What You Should Know About Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is the most common serious liver infection in the world. It is caused by the hepatitis B virus that attacks and injures the liver. Two billion people (or 1 in 3) have been infected and about 300 million people are living with a chronic hepatitis B infection. Each year up to 1 million people die from hepatitis B despite the fact that it is **preventable and treatable.**

Hepatitis B is transmitted through direct contact with infected blood or certain bodily fluids. The virus is most commonly transmitted from an infected pregnant person to their baby during childbirth, due to the blood exchange that happens between mother and baby. It is also transmitted through unsterile medical or dental equipment, unprotected sex, or unsterile needles, or by sharing personal items such as razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, body jewelry.

Hepatitis B is a “silent epidemic” because most people do not have symptoms when they are newly infected or chronically infected. Thus, they can unknowingly spread the virus to others and continue the silent spread of hepatitis B. For people who are chronically infected but don’t have any symptoms, their liver is still being silently damaged which can develop into serious liver disease such as cirrhosis or liver cancer.

The good news is that hepatitis B is **preventable and treatable**. There is a simple blood test to diagnose a hepatitis B infection. **Testing is the only way to know for sure if you are infected.** There is a safe vaccine to prevent hepatitis B. There are effective drug therapies that can manage a chronic hepatitis B infection, and a cure is within sight.

Hepatitis B and Your Liver

The liver is such an important organ that we can survive only one or two days if it completely shuts down - if the liver fails, your body will fail, too. Fortunately, the liver can function even when up to 80% of it is diseased or removed. This is because it has the amazing ability to regenerate - or create - itself from healthy liver cells that still exist.

If your body were an automobile, your liver would be considered the engine. It does hundreds of vital things to make sure everything runs smoothly:

- Stores vitamins, sugar and iron to help give your body energy
- Controls the production and removal of cholesterol
- Clears your blood of waste products, drugs and other poisonous substances
- Makes clotting factors to stop excessive bleeding after cuts or injuries
- Produces immune factors and removes bacteria from the bloodstream
- Releases a substance called "bile" to help digest food and absorb important nutrients
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Hepatitis B Vaccine

The hepatitis B vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine that is recommended for all infants at birth and for children up to 18 years. The hepatitis B vaccine is also recommended for adults living with diabetes and those at high risk for infection due to their jobs, lifestyle, living situations, or

country of birth. Since everyone is at some risk, **all** adults should seriously consider getting the hepatitis B vaccine for a lifetime protection against a preventable chronic liver disease.

The hepatitis B vaccine is also known as the first "anti-cancer" vaccine because it prevents hepatitis B, the leading cause of liver cancer worldwide.

You cannot get hepatitis B from the vaccine. All hepatitis B vaccines that have been used since 1986 are made synthetically – meaning the hepatitis B vaccines do not contain any blood products.

No evidence has been found that the hepatitis B vaccine causes sudden infant deaths (SIDs), autism, multiple sclerosis, or other neurological disorders.

Common side effects from the hepatitis B vaccine may include soreness, swelling and redness at the injection site. The vaccine may not be recommended for those with documented yeast allergies or a history of an adverse reaction to the vaccine.

Taken from hepb.org