

## HEPATITIS B

### WHAT IS HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver. Some people who get Hepatitis B never feel sick. Others develop flu-like symptoms, such as fatigue and nausea. Some become very ill with fever, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay coloured stools and jaundice (yellowish colour of the skin and eyes). Less than 1% of the severely ill will die. If you are infected with Hepatitis B (whether you are ill or not), you can pass the virus to others.

Most people recover completely. They cannot spread the virus to others and are protected from future infections of Hepatitis B. However, 3-10% become chronic carriers who continue to carry the virus in their blood and body fluids for life and can pass the infection to others. Carriers look healthy but many may develop cirrhosis or cancer of the liver later in life. Carriers require continuing medical follow up.

### HOW IS HEPATITIS B SPREAD?

The virus is spread to other people by sexual contact and contact with blood and body fluids with a newly infected person or with a person who is a chronic carrier. Hepatitis B is not spread by water, food or casual contact. Blood must enter a break in the skin or be absorbed through the mucous membrane: e.g. eyes, mouth, vagina, rectum. A mother who is a carrier can pass it to her baby during childbirth.

### HOW IS HEPATITIS B TREATED?

There is no treatment that can kill the virus. Most people who get Hepatitis B recover completely and are then protected from future infection by their own natural immunity.

### HOW IS HEPATITIS B PREVENTED?

- (1) By having the Hepatitis B vaccine.
- (2) By practising safer sex. Use a condom every time you have genital contact, oral, anal or vaginal sex.
- (3) By never sharing needles, injection equipment or other recreational drug paraphernalia. ***(please turn over)***

- (4) Never share toothbrushes, razors, nail files or other personal items that may have tiny amounts of blood on them. (The virus lives in dried blood for up to seven days).
- (5) For activities that cut the skin, such as tattooing or ear/body piercing, be sure the equipment is new for each use or has been thoroughly sterilized.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

**Call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at 416-392-2437  
or go to  
[www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health)**

**SAFER SEX**

**To reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), use a condom every time you have genital contact, vaginal, anal or oral sex.**

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