

What about my partner?

The chance of passing hepatitis B on to people you have sex with depends on the stage of infection.

The people you have sex with and the people who live with you may be at risk of getting the infection from you and will need to be tested and offered vaccination. If you have hepatitis B, this will be explained to you by the healthcare provider who sees you.

When can I have sex again?

This will depend on the stage of your hepatitis B infection. Your partner or any new partners should be tested and vaccinated against hepatitis B before having sex with them. This will be explained to you by the healthcare provider who sees you.

What happens if hepatitis B is left untreated?

Some people will naturally clear the virus.

For many, the infection will remain and, without treatment, the virus can lead to long-term damage to their health, for example liver disease (cirrhosis) or liver cancer.

Hepatitis B in pregnancy

Screening for hepatitis B is a routine part of care in pregnancy and is done during the first antenatal visit. People diagnosed with hepatitis B in pregnancy are referred to a specialist in managing hepatitis B infection. The baby will need to be vaccinated against hepatitis B when they are born and may need some additional treatment. Your antenatal team will discuss this with you.

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Sláinte Ghnéis &
Clár um Thoirchis Ghéarchéime
**Sexual Health &
Crisis Pregnancy Programme**

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A guide to Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that infects the liver.

Hepatitis B is a major cause of serious liver disease such as cirrhosis and liver cancer, and affects millions of people worldwide.

In most people a full course of vaccination prevents infection.

How common is hepatitis B?

In Ireland, hepatitis B is not common among the general population. Most cases are found in people with multiple sexual partners, gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and people born in countries that have higher levels of hepatitis B.

How do I get hepatitis B?

- From condomless sex (oral, vaginal, anal) and rimming (mouth to anus contact)
- From sharing injecting equipment
- To babies during pregnancy or delivery
- From sharing toothbrushes, razors or towels contaminated with infected blood.

You cannot catch hepatitis B from:

- Sneezing or coughing
- Kissing or hugging
- Sharing dishes or glasses
- Food or water.

What symptoms would I have with hepatitis B?

Many people with hepatitis B have no symptoms, many do not even realise that they are infected and most people who are infected have no symptoms for many years.

Some people may have symptoms when they first become infected, which can last for several weeks. These may include flu-like symptoms, feeling sick (nausea), or vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine, pale faeces (poo) or itchy skin.

In a small number of people the initial infection can be severe and they can develop liver failure, which can lead to death. This is rare.

How can I be tested for hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is diagnosed by a blood test. Your healthcare provider will ask for certain tests depending on your circumstances and explain what the results mean for you.

How can I prevent myself from getting hepatitis B?

There are vaccines that prevent infection with hepatitis B.

Not sharing injecting equipment and using condoms correctly and every time you have sex will reduce your risk of getting hepatitis B and other STIs.

Who should be vaccinated against hepatitis B?

Since 2008 in Ireland, the hepatitis B vaccine is given to infants as part of the primary childhood immunisation programme, in the 6 in 1 vaccine. If you have not been vaccinated and would like to find out more about hepatitis B vaccination please discuss this with your healthcare provider.

Can hepatitis B be treated?

Yes, hepatitis B can be treated. If you are diagnosed with hepatitis B, you will need to see a doctor who specialises in the treatment and management of the infection.

There are different stages of hepatitis B infection.

Some stages need treatment and some do not need treatment but need to be checked regularly (monitored).

If you have hepatitis B, the stages of infection, treatments and check-ups will all be explained to you by the healthcare provider who sees you.