



# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q What is hepatitis B?**

**A** It is a virus that attacks the liver.

**Q How do you get hepatitis B?**

**A** Hepatitis B is transmitted through blood and infected bodily fluids. Often Asian Americans are born with it. Other risks include:

- ✚ Travel to areas where hepatitis B is common (such as South East Asia)
- ✚ Sharing razors, or toothbrushes with someone who has hepatitis B
- ✚ Living in a household with someone who has hepatitis B
- ✚ Using unsterilized needles for acupuncture, tattooing, or piercing
- ✚ Having unprotected sex with someone who has hepatitis B
- ✚ Having a job at a hospital or other place that could put you in contact with contaminated blood

**Q Is hepatitis B serious?**

**A** Yes, it can be very serious. The hepatitis B virus attacks liver cells and can lead to liver damage, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver cancer, and death.

**Q How do I know if I have hepatitis B?**

**A** The only way to be sure if you have hepatitis B is to take a blood test. Talk to your doctor about getting tested.

**Q Why is hepatitis B called the “silent killer”?**

**A** Many people get very sick with hepatitis B and never know that they have it. The liver does not have many nerve endings and you may not feel any pain or have any outward sign that your liver is being attacked by the hepatitis B virus.

**Q Are there signs or symptoms which would let me know I have hepatitis B?**

**A** No, most often a person with hepatitis B has no symptoms at all until very late when there is liver damage or liver cancer. Many people are infected with hepatitis B and don't even know that they have it. If you have symptoms, you might have:

- ✚ Loss of appetite
- ✚ Tiredness
- ✚ Yellow skin or yellowing of the whites of your eyes (jaundice)
- ✚ Joint pain
- ✚ Abdominal discomfort
- ✚ Nausea and vomiting
- ✚ Dark urine





**Q Do I have to worry about being around someone who has hepatitis B?**

**A** No you don't, hepatitis B is not spread by:

- Kissing on the cheek
- Coughing or sneezing
- Casual contact such as hugging or holding hands
- Eating food prepared by an infected individual
- Breastfeeding
- Sharing eating utensils or chopsticks

**Q How do I prevent getting hepatitis B?**

**A** There is a safe and effective vaccine which will protect you. See your doctor and ask for the first of three shots. After you get all three shots you will be almost 100% protected against hepatitis B for the rest of your life.

**Q Should I get the hepatitis B vaccine?**

**A** The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for all adults who may be at high risk for infection, including Asian Americans. All children and adolescents who have not been vaccinated, regardless of their race or country of birth should also be vaccinated.

**Q Should I be tested for hepatitis B?**

**A** Yes you should. Why? Because . . .

- 30% of all people with hepatitis B have no symptoms
- Asian Americans are at higher risk than other Americans
- You could infect others without knowing it
- You want to know as soon as possible so that you can avoid damaging your liver further and reduce your risk of developing liver cancer
- You want to know if treatment may help to decrease the damage to your liver
- You can protect your family by having them receive the vaccine

**Q Why is hepatitis B an issue for Asian Americans?**

**A** Asian Americans account for more than half of all hepatitis B cases in the United States. Asians have the highest rates of liver cancer of any ethnic group.

**Q What happens if I get infected with hepatitis B?**

**A** Many people who come in contact with hepatitis B fight off the infection and never get sick. Other people are not able to fight off the infection and become infected with hepatitis B. If you are infected with hepatitis B you may not even know it. Most of the time, there is no way to know if you are infected unless you get a blood test.

**Q What should I do if I have hepatitis B?**

**A** See your doctor. Consider finding a specialist. Get evaluated to see if you might benefit from treatment. There are treatments available for people with hepatitis B. Find out if treatment will help you and which one will work best for you. Getting treatment for hepatitis B can prevent you from getting sick, getting liver cancer, needing a liver transplant, and can save your life.

