

FACT SHEET: HEPATITS B

Symptoms:

Half of adults and only 10% of children actually develop symptoms. Onset is gradual with anorexia (loss of appetite), vague abdominal discomfort, nausea and vomiting, and often progresses to jaundice. Fever may be absent or mild.

About 10% of all infected adults become chronic viral carriers. Some carriers develop liver disease (cirrhosis) or liver cancer, after many years.

Occurrence:

Occurs worldwide. In North America, adults transmit the disease to other adults mainly through sex or IV drug use.

Transmission:

Hepatitis B is found in all body secretions and excretions, but blood, saliva, semen, and vaginal secretions are most infectious. May be spread by contaminated needles, tattoos, ear and body piercing, syringes, and other IV equipment, as well as by contamination of wounds or cuts or the exposure of the mucous membranes to infected blood or body fluids.

Incubation Period:

14 to 180 days (average 60 to 90 days)

Period of Communicability:

Many weeks before the onset of symptoms, while the person has symptoms, and during the chronic carrier stage, which may persist a lifetime (especially if infected as a baby).

Reservoir:

Man

Management:

In an emergency situation, Emergency Service Workers are at greatest risk of exposure to Hepatitis B through:

- Contact with infected blood or body fluids without protective equipment
- Needlestick or other sharp injury
- Human bite

Preventative measures include:

- Hepatitis B vaccination with antibody level greater than 10 IU/L 4-6 weeks after 3rd dose
- Gloves should be worn when contact with blood or saliva may occur
- Protective eyewear and masks are indicated if potential contact with blood/body fluid to the face could occur
- Blankets or towels contaminated with blood or body fluids should be bagged for cleaning
- Decontamination of equipment and surfaces with blood or body fluids must be done
- Do not eat or drink until the above has been done