

Hepatitis B Factsheet

Information for Foster Carers

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver. In the UK, approximately 1 in 1000 people are thought to have the virus. In areas such as South-East Asia, the Middle and Far East, southern Europe and Africa, the infection is much more common.

Many people with acute hepatitis B infection have no symptoms at all and do not know that they are infected. Others have 'flu-like' symptoms and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice). In most cases hepatitis B infection can only be identified by a blood test. Most adults infected with hepatitis B recover fully, but 1 in 10 may develop a prolonged, chronic infection. A small proportion of these people develop serious liver disease later in life.

Hepatitis B infection can be prevented by a course of vaccinations.

How can you get Hepatitis B infection?

Hepatitis B virus is carried in the blood and body fluids. There are three main ways that infection is spread:

- From an infected mother to her baby during birth
- From unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person without a condom
- By direct contact with the blood of an infected person e.g. by sharing toothbrushes and razors; from equipment used for tattooing and body piercing; and between drug users who share needles, syringes and other equipment.

The virus is **not** spread by normal day to day contact and activities e.g. coughing, sneezing, kissing, hugging, holding hands, sharing bathrooms and toilets or food, cups, cutlery, crockery and towels. However, it is recommended that both sexual **and** household contacts of a person with the infection are protected by vaccination.

Testing and vaccination

If you think you may have been exposed to hepatitis B, either through risk behaviours or through close contact with someone who has the infection, then you are advised to visit your GP for a blood test to see if you are infected.

- If you are already infected with hepatitis B, you will receive further advice from your GP and the Health Protection Team.
- If you are not infected, then you can be vaccinated against hepatitis B to protect you from future infection.

If you have **not** been at significant risk, you do **not** need the blood test before you are vaccinated against hepatitis B.

The following measures will protect you against all blood borne viruses:

- Never share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, scissors and nail clippers as they can carry small amounts of blood
- Practice safer sex – use a condom
- Never share equipment used for tattoos and body piercing
- Never share injecting equipment for drug use – needles, syringes, swabs, spoons, filters, water or anything else.

Further information

Information on hepatitis B infection and vaccine is available at:

- Hepatitis B. NHS Inform
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/hepatitis-b>
- Hepatitis B vaccine – Immunisation in Scotland. NHS Inform
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/immunisation/vaccines/hepatitis-b-vaccine>
- Hepatitis B – Fit for Travel
<https://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/advice/disease-prevention-advice/hepatitis-b>
- Hepatitis B vaccine - NHS
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/hepatitis-b-vaccine/>

Further information on hepatitis B vaccination is available from:

- NHS Lothian Health Protection Team on **0300 790 6264**
Monday to Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm

Further information on sexual transmission is available from:

- Chalmers Sexual Health Centre on **0131 536 1070**