

Hepatitis B – information for close contacts

Hepatitis B is a viral disease that damages your liver. While children usually develop a mild illness it can be more serious for adults.

If you're told you're a close contact of someone with hepatitis B it means there was a risk you may have caught the disease. A health professional will be in touch to provide advice and support.

Close contacts of people with hepatitis B need to:

- 1 Have a blood test to check if you have been infected. This will be free.**
- 2 Get vaccinated (if the blood test shows you are not infected).** This is free if you are under 18, live with the person or have had sex with them. If you are not in any of these groups it's still recommended you get vaccinated, but there may be a fee.
- 3 Avoid having close physical or sexual contact with the person with hepatitis B until you've been vaccinated, and avoid coming into contact with their blood or other bodily fluids.**
- 4 Watch out for symptoms of hepatitis B and seek medical advice if you become unwell.**

You do not need to stay home in quarantine if you are a close contact.



Watch out for symptoms

Common symptoms of hepatitis B include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Dark coloured urine
- Pale coloured bowel motions
- Generally feeling unwell and tired
- Loss of appetite
- Stomach upsets and pains
- Mild fever
- General aches and pains

Once you are infected with the virus it may be several months before you become unwell. Around 1 in 5 people with hepatitis B do not get any symptoms, however they can still pass it on to others.

If you have symptoms that could be hepatitis B contact your healthcare provider or ring Healthline for free on 0800 611 116. You may need to have a blood test to check if you have the disease.



For more information visit:
www.arphs.nz/hepatitis-b



How it spreads

The disease is spread through coming into contact with the blood, semen or other bodily fluids of someone with hepatitis B. If a person is very infectious it may also be spread through their saliva.

Ways it can be passed on include:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse
- Sharing needles when injecting drugs
- Tattooing, ear-piercing or acupuncture using contaminated instruments
- Childbirth if a mother has the disease
- Coming into contact with the cuts, grazes or sores of someone with the disease

It can also be passed on within households through sharing tooth brushes or razors with an infected person.

Hepatitis B is not spread by holding hands, hugging, kissing on the cheek, sneezing or coughing, food, water or visiting an infected person.

Protect yourself against hepatitis B

- **The vaccine provides very good protection against hepatitis B.** It is 90% effective in children and 80 – 90% effective in adults.
- **The vaccine is very safe.** The most common side effect is redness and swelling around the injection site. Sometimes people may have a mild fever afterwards.
- **It is free for babies and anyone aged 18 years old or under.** All children born in New Zealand should get immunised as part of their routine vaccinations while growing up.
- **It is also free for household and sexual close contacts of someone with hepatitis B.** Other close contacts are recommended to also get the vaccine if they've not had it before, but there may be a fee.
- **The vaccine is recommended for those who work in high risk jobs, such as:**
 - health care workers
 - tattooists and
 - sex workers
- The vaccine will not be free for people in these groups, although it may be funded by your employer.