

# HEPATITIS B and Sexual Health



## Can Hepatitis B be spread through sex?

Yes. Hepatitis B is 50–100 times more infectious than HIV and easily transmitted through sexual activity. In fact, sexual contact is the most common way Hepatitis B is spread in the United States.

If you are sexually active, talk to your health professional about your risk for STDs and HIV and get vaccinated against Hepatitis B.

## What is hepatitis?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected.

Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. Heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions can also cause hepatitis.

## What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. When first infected, a person can develop an “acute” infection, which can range in severity from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. **Acute** Hepatitis B refers to the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis B virus. Some people are able to fight the infection and clear the virus. For others, the infection remains and leads to a “chronic,” or lifelong, illness. **Chronic** Hepatitis B refers to the illness that occurs when the Hepatitis B virus remains in a person’s body. Over time, the infection can cause serious health problems.

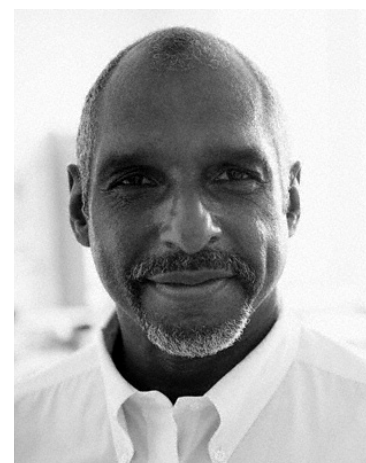
**The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is to get vaccinated.**

## How serious is Hepatitis B?

Over time, approximately 15%–25% of people with chronic Hepatitis B develop serious liver problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure, and even liver cancer. Every year, approximately 3,000 people in the United States and more than 600,000 people worldwide die from Hepatitis B-related liver disease.

## How common is Hepatitis B?

In the United States, an estimated 40,000 new infections occur each year. About 1.2 million people are living with chronic Hepatitis B, and many do not know they are infected.



## How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from a person infected with the Hepatitis B virus enter the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through sexual contact with an infected person; sharing needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment; or from an infected mother to her baby at birth.

