

Patients' Guide to Viral Hepatitis

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C

What Is Viral Hepatitis?

Hepatitis refers to the inflammation of the liver that is often caused by a virus. The most common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

Although each can cause similar symptoms, they are spread in different ways and can affect the liver differently.

Hepatitis A is usually short-term and does not become chronic. Whereas for Hepatitis B and hepatitis C, while they may begin as short-term, the virus may remain in the body and result in chronic disease and long-term liver problems.

There are vaccines to prevent hepatitis A and hepatitis B, but there is currently no vaccine for hepatitis C.

What Are the Signs & Symptoms?

Not everyone with viral hepatitis will have symptoms.

If they do develop, the symptoms may include:

- Yellow skin and/or eyes (jaundice)
- Nausea and loss of appetite
- Dark urine and/or light-coloured faeces
- Diarrhoea and/or stomach pain
- Fever and/or fatigue
- Joint pain and/or exhaustion

For people who develop symptoms, the symptoms usually appear after the following period:

Hepatitis A	2-7 weeks after exposure
Hepatitis B	1 to 6 months after exposure
Hepatitis C	2-12 weeks after exposure

How Is Viral Hepatitis Diagnosed?

Blood tests are carried out to look for:

- Parts of the virus in the blood, or
- Antibodies that your body makes after an exposure or vaccination.

Hepatitis A

How Is Hepatitis A Passed?

Hepatitis A is spread when a person ingests the virus, which is found in the faeces and blood of infected individuals. This can be done through:

- Person-to-person contact through sexual activity (anal and oral)
- Sharing of drugs and syringes
- Eating contaminated food or drink

Who Should Get Tested?

One who has not been vaccinated against hepatitis A should be screened and vaccinated, especially if one:

- Has had unprotected sex with casual partners or sex workers
- Has had a needle-stick injury or injected recreational drugs with others
- Has a sex partner or someone in the same household who is infected with hepatitis C
- Is experiencing homelessness

Can Hepatitis A Cause Other Problems?

If not treated early, those who have hepatitis A may develop medical conditions such as chronic liver disease.

Can Hepatitis A Affect Pregnancy?

Hepatitis A infection in a pregnant woman poses a serious risk to her infant at birth. To address the potential concerns, pregnant women must inform their obstetrician so that necessary precautions can be taken to prevent infecting the newborn.

Can Hepatitis A Be Treated?

To treat the symptoms of hepatitis A, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. There are also medications that can help to clear the infection. Do seek advice from a doctor if you are looking for treatment.

Important Notes on Hepatitis A

Practice safer sex

- Use condoms correctly and every time one has sex
- Avoid drinking excessive amounts of alcohol before or during sex, as this may impair your judgement.
- Have sex without an exchange of bodily fluids (e.g. semen or vaginal secretions).

Hepatitis B

How Is Hepatitis B Passed?

Hepatitis B is usually spread through:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person (vaginal, anal, oral)
- Receiving contaminated blood products
- Sharing contaminated needles
- Infected mother to her child (during child birth)
- Sharing personal items, such as shavers and toothbrushes, where there may be blood contamination.

Who Should Get Tested?

One who has not been vaccinated or tested to be immune (protected) from hepatitis B should be screened and vaccinated, especially if one:

- Has had unprotected sex with casual partners or sex workers, or receive money for sex
- Has had a needle-stick injury or has injected recreational drugs with others
- Has a sex partner or someone in the same household with hepatitis B
- Is a man and has sex with other men
- Is HIV positive

Can Hepatitis B Cause Other Problems?

After treatment, most people clear the virus and get better from the hepatitis B infection.

However, some may not be able to fight the virus and will become long-term carriers. Some of them will get a higher chance of getting liver cancer or liver failure.

Can Hepatitis B Affect Pregnancy?

Hepatitis B infection in a pregnant woman poses a serious risk to her infant at birth. However, this is preventable. Pregnant women must inform their obstetrician so that necessary precautions can be taken to prevent infecting the newborn.

Can Hepatitis B Be Treated?

There are medications that can help to clear the infection. Do seek advice from a doctor if you are looking for treatment.

Important Notes on Hepatitis B

- Vaccination is recommended if you are not immune either through vaccination or a past cleared infection.
- If you are a carrier, have regular check-ups with your doctor to assess your liver function and to detect any early cancer-related changes. Inform your doctor and dentist if you are a carrier so that precautions can be taken during procedures.

Practice safer sex

- Use condoms correctly and every time one has sex
- Avoid drinking excessive amounts of alcohol before or during sex, as this may impair your judgement.
- Have sex without an exchange of bodily fluids (e.g. semen or vaginal secretions).

Hepatitis C

How Is Hepatitis C Passed?

Hepatitis C is passed through exposures to infectious blood or body fluids that contain infected blood. This can be done through:

- Injection-drug use
- Birth to a mother who has Hepatitis C
- Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person
- Unregulated tattooing
- Sharing personal items contaminated with infectious blood, e.g. razors or toothbrushes

Who Should Get Tested?

One who has ongoing risk factors should be screened for hepatitis C, especially if one:

- Currently inject drugs or have ever injected drugs, even if it was just once or many years ago
- Has had unprotected sex with casual partners or sex workers
- Has ever injected drugs and shared needles, syringes, or other drug preparation equipment
- Has a sex partner or someone in the same household who is infected with hepatitis C
- Is HIV positive

Can Hepatitis C Cause Other Problems?

If not treated early, those who have hepatitis C may develop medical conditions such as chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Can Hepatitis B Affect Pregnancy?

Hepatitis C infection in a pregnant woman poses a serious risk to her infant at birth. To address the potential concerns, pregnant women must inform their obstetrician so that necessary precautions can be taken to prevent infecting the newborn.

Can Hepatitis C Be Treated?

There are medications that can help to clear the infection. Do seek advice from a doctor if you are looking for treatment.

Reach Out to Us

If you still have queries, feel free to call us at the following numbers:

HIV/STI Hotline (8am – 5pm)

1800 252 1324

Health Info Recorded Hotline (24 hours)

+65 6295 2944

Appointments

+65 6293 9648

You may also visit www.dsc-clinic.sg for more information, or find us at the DSC Clinic, 31 Kelantan Lane #01-16 S(200031).

Disclaimer

We have attempted to provide full, accurate, and up-to-date information in this patient information leaflet, based on current medical evidence and opinion. However, information and advice may vary from different sources and over time. If you have any further questions, do see your doctor or healthcare provider.

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