

Hepatitis B and liver cancer

Hepatitis B is a virus that can increase your risk of liver cancer.

Finding hepatitis B early could save your life.



What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that affects the liver. It can cause:

- liver inflammation (swelling)
- liver scarring (also known as cirrhosis); and
- liver cancer.

How do you get hepatitis B?

The hepatitis B virus is passed through blood or sexual fluids from someone with the virus. Most people get it at birth or as a young child; especially in countries where hepatitis B is common.

It can also be spread through:

- unprotected sex (without a condom)
- sharing items with blood on them such as syringes, razors, toothbrushes or nail clippers
- unsterile equipment for tattoos, piercings, or medical or dental treatment.

It cannot be spread by:

- sharing food, drinks and cutlery
- hugging and kissing
- eating dirty or certain types of food
- shaking hands.

Can hepatitis B be prevented?

Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis B infection.

All babies born in Australia are now offered the vaccination at birth. Children and adults who have not had the hepatitis B vaccine can also get the vaccine to protect against the virus. It is important to finish three doses of the vaccine to be safe.

The vaccine won't work if you already have hepatitis B. That's why it's important to have a blood test to find out first if you have the virus.

How do I find out if I have hepatitis B?

Many people with hepatitis B do not have any signs. To find out if you have hepatitis B, ask your doctor for a blood test.

- If you do not have hepatitis B, getting the vaccine will protect you against infection.
- If you have hepatitis B, your doctor will advise you on what to do next to protect your liver health.

Who should be tested for hepatitis B?

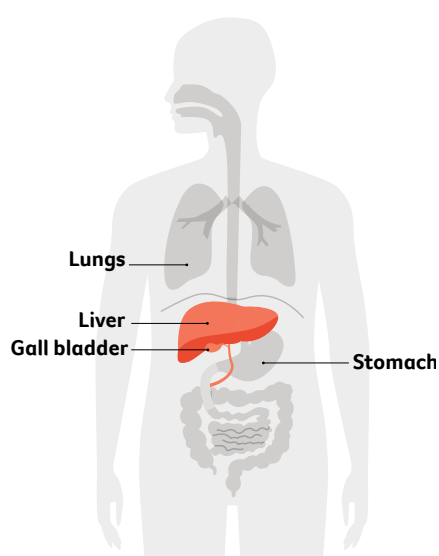
Some people are at a higher risk of hepatitis B infection than others, especially people born in places where hepatitis B is common and/or where the hepatitis B vaccine is not available.

Speak to your doctor to see if you should be tested.

How does hepatitis B cause liver cancer?

Hepatitis B affects people in different ways. Some people become sick, and some people don't, and that depends on what the virus is doing in your liver. The hepatitis B virus can cause the liver to get inflamed and damaged. Over time if it is not treated, this can lead to liver cancer.

Without care, one in four people with hepatitis B will get liver damage and some will get liver cancer.



What do I do if I have hepatitis B?

If you are diagnosed with hepatitis B, you will need to have regular check-ups with your doctor to check what the virus is doing to your liver.

At each visit, you will be asked to get a blood test to see what the virus is doing, and sometimes an ultrasound and/or FibroScan® to check the health of your liver.

Most people with hepatitis B need to see their doctor 1-2 times a year. Your doctor will let you know how often to come. It's important to attend your check up, even if you feel healthy or your last test results were normal.

Is there a treatment for hepatitis B?

There is no cure for hepatitis B but there is treatment to help keep the virus under control and prevent liver damage and liver cancer.

Not everyone with hepatitis B will need treatment. If your doctor told you to take your medicine, you need to take it every day, even if you feel well.



What can I do to look after my liver health?

If you have hepatitis B, the best thing you can do is to go for regular check-ups with your doctor and take your medication if your doctor has recommended it.

It's also important to:

- eat a variety of healthy foods
- exercise and keep active
- not smoke
- not drink alcohol or take recreational drugs
- rest when you need to.

Where can I get more information and support?

Visit www.cancervic.org.au or speak to a Cancer Council nurse on 13 11 20. If you need an interpreter, call 13 14 50.