

## **Diseases Fact Sheet - Hepatitis B**

### **South Dakota Department of Health**

**Office of Disease Prevention Services - 605-773-3737 -(1-800-592-1861 in South Dakota only)**

This material is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical care. We are not able to answer personal medical questions. Please see your health care provider concerning appropriate care, treatment or other medical advice.

#### **What is it?**

Hepatitis B (formerly known as serum hepatitis) is a liver disease caused by a virus. The disease is fairly common.

#### **Who gets hepatitis B?**

Anyone can get hepatitis B, but those at greater risk include:

- Infants born to infected mothers
- Sex partners of infected persons
- Men who have sex with men
- Injection drug users
- Household contacts or sexual partners of known persons with chronic hepatitis B infection
- Health care and public safety workers at risk for occupational exposure to blood or blood-contaminated body fluids
- Hemodialysis patients

#### **How is the virus spread?**

Hepatitis B virus can be found in the blood and, to a lesser extent, saliva, semen and other body fluids of an infected person. It is spread by direct contact with infected body fluids; usually by needle stick injury or sexual contact.

#### **What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?**

The symptoms of hepatitis B include fatigue, poor appetite, fever, vomiting and occasionally joint pain, hives or rash. Urine may become darker in color, and then jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and white of the eyes) may appear. Some individuals may experience few or no symptoms.

#### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The symptoms may appear two to six months after exposure but usually within three months.

### **For how long is a person able to spread the virus?**

The virus can be found in blood and other body fluids several weeks before symptoms appear and generally persists for several months afterward. Approximately 10 percent of infected people may become long-term carriers of the virus.

### **What is the treatment for hepatitis B?**

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person once the symptoms appear. Generally, bed rest is all that is needed.

### **What precautions should hepatitis B carriers take?**

Hepatitis B carriers should follow standard hygienic practices to ensure that close contacts are not directly contaminated by his or her blood or other body fluids. Carriers must not share razors, toothbrushes or any other object that may become contaminated with blood. In addition, susceptible household members, particularly sexual partners, should be immunized with hepatitis B vaccine. It is important for carriers to inform their dentist and health care providers.

### **How can hepatitis B be prevented?**

A vaccine to prevent hepatitis B has been available for several years. It is safe, effective and is recommended for people in high-risk settings who have not already been infected. A special hepatitis B immune globulin is also available for people who are exposed to the virus. In the event of exposure to hepatitis B, consult a doctor or the local health department.

### [Learn About Immunizations in South Dakota](#)

#### **Related Sites:**

- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [South Dakota Department of Health, Immunization Program](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - [Vaccines and Immunizations](#)
  - [Parents Guide to Childhood Immunizations](#)
  - [Viral Hepatitis](#)
  - [Injection Drug Use](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)