

# Hepatitis B and C

Hepatitis B and C are viruses that infect the liver and, if the infections become chronic, can cause scarring of the liver, liver failure and even liver cancer. Hepatitis B and C are common in the United States. Although they are not frequently spread via sex, certain activities and conditions increase the risk of contracting these viruses. Because of the serious long term effects on the liver, screening for hepatitis B and C may be important depending on a person's exposure history.

## Hepatitis B virus

### How common is hepatitis B?

It is estimated there are between 850,000 and 2.2 million people living with hepatitis B in the United States<sup>1</sup>. You can protect yourself from contracting hepatitis B by getting the vaccination.

### How could I be exposed to hepatitis B?

The hepatitis B virus is found mostly in the blood and to a much lesser degree in other bodily secretions (semen, vaginal secretions, and saliva). Most cases of hepatitis B are not transmitted sexually, but anal sex without a condom has been found to be a cause of hepatitis B transmission.

### If I have been exposed to hepatitis B, how long until I might have symptoms?

Most of the time, acute hepatitis B infection causes no symptoms. That is why we screen for it. Symptoms can appear, however, six weeks to six months after infection.

### What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Again, about half of newly infected people have no symptoms. Some people may experience fever, body aches, nausea and vomiting, abdominal pain, and jaundice.

### Is it treatable?

About 90 percent of the time, a person's own immune system fights off the infection and nothing more is needed. But about 10 percent of the time, the virus becomes chronic. If it does become chronic, there is no current cure, although there are ways to treat symptoms and help support the liver as it deals with the infection.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Viral Hepatitis-Statistics & Surveillance. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/statistics>

## **Hepatitis C virus**

### **How common is hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C is the most common bloodborne infection in the United States, with about 2.7 to 3.9 million persons who are living with the infection in the U.S. currently<sup>2</sup>. There is no hepatitis C vaccine.

### **How could I be exposed to hepatitis C?**

Fortunately, hepatitis C is not easily transmitted through sex. Studies suggest that the chances of transmitting hepatitis C go up any time there is disrupted tissue, which is most common with anal sex or if a person has an existing STI or other infection.

### **If I have been exposed to hepatitis C, how long until I might have symptoms?**

Most people do not have symptoms, but if you do have symptoms, they can occur two weeks to six months after infection, but usually four to six weeks after infection.

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

Most people with new hepatitis C infection have no symptoms or very mild body aches which are easily attributable to other common ailments such a cold or flu. A small percentage of people develop abdominal pains, nausea, and jaundice.

### **Is it treatable?**

About 20 percent of people resolve the infection with no chronic issues. About 80 percent of people with an acute infection go on to develop a chronic infection (i.e., their immune system is not able to fully resolve the infection), and are at increased risk for chronic inflammation and scarring in their liver. Sometimes regular monitoring of the disease is merited. There is a treatment available that has a very high cure rate (near 97 percent).

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Viral Hepatitis-Statistics & Surveillance. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/statistics>

## **Should I get tested for the hepatitis B and C viruses?**

This depends on how your exposure history. In general, people with many sex partners, who don't consistently use barrier devices with sex, or who have anal sex, are at increased risk for contracting these viruses. In addition, intravenous and intranasal drug use is significantly associated with hepatitis C infection.

## **How do you test for hepatitis B and C?**

Screening for both viruses is done with blood tests.

## **How long after infection will a screening test turn positive?**

For hepatitis B, screening tests will generally detect become positive in three to six weeks following infection.

For hepatitis C, screening tests will detect most infections at two months and nearly all infections by six months.

## **How will you notify me of my test results?**

We relay negative results via a secure message to you via myUOHealth student portal.

If you test positive, we will call you by phone. If you don't answer, we'll leave a generic message to call us back to discuss your recent test results.

## **What happens if I test positive for hepatitis B or C?**

If your blood tests show you've never been exposed to hepatitis B, we'll recommend you get the vaccination.

If your blood tests show you have been exposed to hepatitis B or hepatitis C, we will schedule an appointment for you with a UHC clinician as soon as possible. At that visit, you will get all the information you need, have your questions answered, and likely get additional blood testing and possibly vaccinations against other types of viruses that can also infect the liver.