



Hepatitis A, B and C

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Viral infection, drugs and alcohol can cause this. Hepatitis may be present without obvious symptoms. There are three common kinds of viral Hepatitis that are called A, B and C.

If symptoms are present these include jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), nausea (feeling sick) and flu-like symptoms.



Hepatitis A

This is usually passed from person-to-person through infected food or water, often because of inadequate attention to hygiene. It is more common overseas than in the UK. Risk of acquiring this infection through sexual contact is low, although outbreaks may occur in men who have sex with men, especially if they have multiple partners. Oral-anal sex ("rimming"), anal intercourse and fingering the anus are the most common sexual activities that allow Hepatitis A to pass between people.

You can get a vaccination to help protect you. This is recommended if you are travelling outside of Europe and if you are in close contact with an infected person.

Vaccination is recommended for men who have sex with men.

This infection usually settles on its own without the need for any specific treatment as the body is able to clear the virus rapidly on its own. Rarely, a person with this infection may need hospital treatment if they become really unwell. Most people do not become ill.

When people do experience symptoms they may notice tiredness, feeling unwell, loss of appetite and sometimes stomach pain. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) can develop at the same time as darkening of the urine. All people will get immunity to Hepatitis A after they have been exposed to it. People do not become carriers of this infection as the body clears all traces of it permanently.

Prevention

- Vaccination – Two doses of the vaccine are needed to give full protection.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly before handling food, always wash fruit and other foods before eating it.
- Using a barrier e.g. dental dam when rimming (mouth to anus contact).



Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B can be passed on through:

- Unprotected sex with an infected person
- Infected blood
- Sharing needles or works
- Blood transfusion (although all UK blood is screened for Hepatitis B infections)
- Unhygienic practices in tattoo/piercing parlours (you should always make sure all equipment is sterile and seen to come out of a sealed packet)
- Sharing razors or toothbrushes
- Pregnancy (from mother to baby)

Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for:

- Men who have sex with men
- Sex workers (of either sex)
- IV drug users

- HIV positive individuals
- Following recent sexual assault (within 6 weeks)
- If you are travelling to countries where Hepatitis B is more common (check with GP or travel clinic)
- Health Care workers and others at risk occupations

Hepatitis B infection is often completely cleared from the body without an infected person ever knowing they have had the infection; however, some individuals become long-term carriers and remain infectious as they are unable to clear the infection. These individuals require medical help to clear the infection using anti-viral drugs, because of the risk of liver damage and infection to others.

Some people do experience symptoms that they describe as "flu-like" illness, which can include loss of appetite, nausea and tiredness and occasionally abdominal pain and jaundice.

Prevention

- Vaccination – Three doses of the vaccine are needed to give full protection. It is sometimes given as a joint vaccine with Hepatitis A (two-in-one).
- Safer sex – There is a risk of spreading Hepatitis B through any sexual activity. Anyone with Hepatitis B should use condoms until partner(s) are tested and vaccinated. The use of condoms and safer sexual practices is highly recommended for anyone with Hepatitis B

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whose partner has not been vaccinated.

- Injecting drug use – Sharing ANY injecting equipment carries a high risk of infection. Users should use sterile (or their own) clean syringes, needles, mixing utensils, filters and water for EVERY injection.
- Advice for safer-sex from Sandyford Health Advisers.



Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C can be passed on through:

- Infected blood products.
- Sharing needles or works. Injecting drug users sharing any injecting equipment carries a high risk of infection. Users should use sterile (or their own) clean syringes, needles, mixing utensils, filters and water for EVERY injection.
- Blood Transfusion (although all UK blood is screened for Hepatitis C infections).
- Unhygienic practices in tattoo/piercing parlours (you should always make sure all equipment is sterile and seen to come out of a sealed packet).
- Sharing razors or toothbrushes with an infected person.
- Pregnancy (from mother to baby).
- Unprotected sex with an infected person (more common amongst HIV+ men who have sex with men).

The most common method of infection is through intravenous drug use, through sharing needles or works.

There is no current vaccination for this infection.

The infection may resolve without treatment in some people. The diagnosis of Hepatitis C is

made by having a blood test. If the first blood test suggests infection with Hepatitis C, then further tests are done to see if the virus is actually active (that means infectious and able to do damage to the liver). If blood tests show the virus is present in the blood, referral to a specialist Hepatitis C clinic is recommended, as there is a risk of liver damage and further transmission to others.

Specialist clinics offer antiviral treatment, which can help to treat the virus and help the body clear it completely. This treatment can take many months. Different people go through the treatment in different ways as there are different types of the virus. A Hepatitis C specialist will work out the best treatment for a particular patient and their virus type.

**For further information contact :
Sexual Health Advisers on 0141 211 8634.**

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