



## **Hepatitis**

Hepatitis is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver. The most common types of hepatitis are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.

### **Hepatitis A**

Hepatitis A is spread through food or water that has been contaminated with fecal matter infected with the virus. Risk factors for hepatitis A include: a family member with hepatitis, working in a daycare or having children in day care, and travel to foreign countries.

Hepatitis A can be silent or can cause flu-like symptoms. Fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, fever, diarrhea, muscle aches and pain are most common symptoms. Jaundice can occur with yellow skin and eyes and dark urine appearing. The treatment for hepatitis A is resting and treating symptoms.

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is immunization. Other preventative measures include hand washing after using the bathroom and before eating or fixing food. Drinking bottled water or purifying the water when traveling also helps prevent the transmission of Hepatitis A. Avoid drinks with ice cubes and fruit washed in tap water is also recommended.

### **Hepatitis B**

Hepatitis B virus is transmitted by contact with blood or semen of an infected person and is considered a sexually transmitted disease. It is much more serious than hepatitis A because hepatitis B can persist in the liver for many years causing a chronic hepatitis and liver failure. Most people with hepatitis B develop immunity to the virus and are able to clear the virus from their system. In approximately 5-10% of infected individuals, the infection persists. These people become chronic carriers. All carriers can pass the virus to others through their blood, semen or vaginal fluids. It can also be spread on razors or shared tooth brushes. Children can be infected during child birth if the mother is a Hepatitis B carrier. The virus cannot be contracted through casual contact such as shaking hands, sharing food or drink, coughing or sneezing.

The symptoms of hepatitis B are similar to hepatitis A. Many patients have no symptoms and do not know they have had an infection.

To diagnose carriers of hepatitis B, a blood test can be done that measures a surface antigen to hepatitis B. If the test is negative, it means you are not a carrier. If the test is positive, it means you have been infected with hepatitis B virus and you can pass it to other people and to your baby if you are pregnant. If you are positive, other members of your family should be tested and vaccinated if indicated. If you are pregnant the baby

will be treated and immunized at birth. People who have been vaccinated for hepatitis B or have had the virus in the past will have hepatitis B antibody. This provides immunity from the disease.

People who are at greater risk of hepatitis B includes: people who inject drugs or share needles, have multiple sexual partners, or have had a sexually transmitted disease, have tattoos, live with someone or have sex with someone who is infected with the virus.

Infection is also high in the Asian population who were born and raised in the Far East. There is a high risk of infection in non-immunized health care workers who are exposed to blood. The best protection against hepatitis B is vaccination. It is given in three doses. The first dose is followed by a second dose after one month and a third dose six months after the first dose. Vaccination is recommended for all babies, children and adolescents under the age of 18. Any person at high risk should also be immunized.

### **Hepatitis C**

Hepatitis C virus is transferred by contact with body fluids from an infected person. Blood, blood products, semen and vaginal fluids all contain the virus. Transmission with child birth or by breast feeding is less common than with hepatitis B.

The symptoms of hepatitis C are similar to hepatitis A & B. Chronic hepatitis C can lead to liver failure after 20-30 years. There is currently no vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C.

For persons with multiple sexual partners the risk of sexual transmission of hepatitis C is increased and latex condoms are recommended. A person with hepatitis C should avoid sharing razors, nail clippers and tooth brushes with family members. No special precautions are recommended for babies born to mothers of hepatitis C and there is no restriction to nursing.