

## HEPATITIS B

Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver. There are several types of hepatitis virus, type B (HBV) causing some of the most serious infections. The virus is spread through contact with blood and body fluids, usually by sexual activity or intravenous drug use. An infected mother can also spread it to her baby during pregnancy. Your risk of contracting the disease is increased if you use drugs, receive kidney dialysis, are a health care worker exposed to blood and body fluids, or if you have sexual relations with any high-risk persons. It is contagious before any symptoms appear, which may take from 1 to 6 months

### Symptoms *may* include:

- Low grade fever and fatigue
- Nausea with or without vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Decreased appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Joint pain
- *Jaundice* (yellowing of the eyes or skin)
- Dark urine and light-colored stools

### What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose hepatitis B by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam, and ordering laboratory blood tests.
- Prescribe an injection with gamma globulin for those in close contact with you.
- This disease must be reported to local health department authorities.

### What *you* can do:

- Rest as much as possible.
- Eat a bland diet and drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid alcohol and acetaminophen (Tylenol®) since these can further inflame and irritate the liver.
- Avoid sexual activity or use condoms consistently to prevent spreading it to others.
- Avoid sharing eating utensils with others.
- Everyone in the family should wash their hands frequently.
- All sexual partners should be tested, even if they are without symptoms.
- For more information contact the Hepatitis Foundation @ 1-800-891-0707.

### What *you* can expect:

- The initial infection usually lasts 2-3 weeks, with full recovery of the liver in about 4 months.
- While most people recover fully, hepatitis B causes death in about 1% of cases.
- Some people do not have any symptoms until years after infection, when complications develop.
- Hepatitis B may become a chronic illness, causing symptoms for years, and some people may be *chronic carriers*, free of illness but able to spread the virus.

**Contact your doctor** if your symptoms remain after 2-3 weeks or if you are at high risk for hepatitis B and have not been immunized.