

**What is hepatitis B?**

Hepatitis B is an infectious inflammation of the liver that is triggered by the hepatitis B virus.

**How is hepatitis B transmitted?**

Hepatitis B is transmitted through contact with body fluids (especially blood and genital secretions) of infected persons, for example by sharing injection syringes, getting tattoos or piercings, and from intercourse (genital, anal or oral). But small lesions of the skin or contact with the mucous membrane can also lead to transmission. Infected mothers can transmit the disease to their child during birth.

**What are its symptoms and its consequences?**

Roughly 10 % of infected children and 30 % to 50 % of infected adults experience no symptoms. In the classical form of hepatitis B, non-specific general symptoms such as loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pains, sometimes also painful joints, fever or a skin rash appear 45 to 180 days after infection. Jaundice may, but doesn't always, occur. In most cases there is a spontaneous full recovery. However, 5 % to 10 % of persons who become infected as adults, and 90% of babies who are infected at birth, develop chronic hepatitis B, which can lead to cirrhosis of the liver or to liver cancer.

A cured hepatitis B infection gives immunity, which means that the affected person cannot be re-infected.

**How is hepatitis B tested for?**

The hepatitis B test is done using a blood sample.

**How is hepatitis B treated?**

Given the frequent incidences of spontaneous recovery, no specific treatment is generally recommended for adults with acute hepatitis B.

Chronic hepatitis B, however, is treated with antiviral drugs. Even though eradication of the hepatitis B virus is, in most cases, not possible with currently available drugs, at least its progress can be controlled. Lifelong treatment is often needed.

**Should sexual partners get treatment as well?**

The person concerned should consider, together with her or his physician, where the infection might have come from and whom it might already have been passed on to. Those sexual partners should get a medical exam.

For some conversation tips and information on further support options, see [www.lovelife.ch](http://www.lovelife.ch).

**How can the infection be prevented?**

Vaccination is the most reliable method of protection against hepatitis B. In Switzerland it is recommended for adolescents between 11 and 15 years of age. It is provided in doctors' offices and is also organised by the school health services in most cantons. Vaccination is basically recommended for anybody of any age. It is especially important for persons with multiple sexual partners (hetero- or homosexual). Hepatitis B vaccination is covered by compulsory health insurance for all age groups.

The [www.myvaccines.ch](http://www.myvaccines.ch) website provides you with a personalised electronic vaccination booklet. Have your doctor or pharmacist advise you. The electronic vaccination booklet makes it easier to keep track of your vaccinations.