

# CHRONIC HEPATITIS B



## What is hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. It can be acute (short term) or chronic (long term). It does not affect growth and development. Most children and youth with chronic hepatitis B were infected at birth – a birth mom with hepatitis B can pass the virus on to her baby.

If your child or youth has chronic hepatitis B, they may feel fine, but they still have the virus in their blood and can pass it to others. That's why it's important to understand how it is shared, and what you can do to protect others.

## How does hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread through blood or body fluids. The hepatitis B virus in an infected person's blood or body fluids has to get into the bloodstream of another person. This can happen through things like sharing toothbrushes or razors, or unprotected sex.

Hepatitis B can be passed to another person through contact with saliva during kissing. The risk of passing hepatitis B to someone this way is really low. The risk would be higher if either person had mouth sores or bleeding gums.

## How to prevent the spread of Hepatitis B to others

### If your child or youth has hepatitis B:

- cover all sores and cuts that bleed or ooze
- ensure they carefully dispose of pads and tampons used if they are on their period
- make sure all family members are vaccinated
- make sure they do not share needles, razors or toothbrushes

### If your youth is sexually active:

- their sexual partners should get the vaccine
- they should always use protection as a backup but condoms can sometimes break
- their doctor needs to know if they do become pregnant, since the baby will need vaccination within 12 hours of birth

## Who needs to know about my child's hepatitis B?

The only people that need to know are:

- doctors and health-care providers
- your child's dentist
- your child's partner when they become sexually active.

There is no need to tell teachers, coaches or friends – they are not at risk. Friends sometimes think that they can catch hepatitis B and then worry about getting sick. And friends may not always keep health information private.

Coaches should use universal precautions when treating injured players-and these precautions will protect them. There is no need for you to tell your coaches about your child's hepatitis B.

## Care for children and youth with Hepatitis B

### Preventing further liver damage

Since hepatitis B is a liver disease, it's important that your child or youth avoid activities that further damage the liver. This includes: Avoid activities that may cause further damage to your liver, like:

- smoking
- using recreational drugs
- using alcohol (it is important for their doctor to know if they are engaging in these activities)

### Blood tests

Blood tests are needed every 6-12 months to show us how well the liver is working. They tell us how much of the virus is in your child's body. Blood tests can also show if your child or youth has seroconverted (low levels of virus in your blood, with your body making antibodies to fight the virus). This is a good sign, because the chance of developing liver problems are very low after seroconversion.

### Follow up appointments

Many children with chronic hepatitis B will have no symptoms and will remain well. Even so, they still need regular follow up appointments. It's important to pick up liver problems early, because by the time symptoms appear, the liver can be quite damaged.

Children and youth who seroconvert still need regular follow up. It is possible that the virus could reactivate ('wake up') during times of stress or other illness.

### Ultrasounds

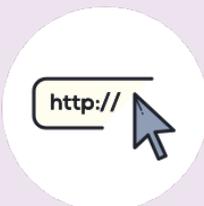
Your child or youth may need an ultrasound from time to time. This helps us to see if the virus is causing any liver damage.

### Liver biopsy

This may be helpful if blood tests or ultrasound show changes in the liver. A biopsy can show how much inflammation or scarring there is. A biopsy can also help to guide treatment options.

## Treatment

There is no cure for Hepatitis B but there are treatment options, and new ones are becoming available. Speak with your family doctor if you and your child would like to explore some of these options. Your doctor will be able to tell you what the treatment involves, side effects, and if it's right for you and your child.



## Need more information?

[Cheo.on.ca](http://cheo.on.ca) is the best place to find information on CHEO's programs and services and learn about a variety of health topics for children and youth. Visit our online resource section to access CHEO-recommended websites, books, apps, videos and more!