

Newsletter

HEPATITIS B

Compiled by: Lancet Laboratories SA

Understanding what Hepatitis B is?

Hepatitis B is inflammation of the Liver due to an infection with the Hepatitis B virus. The severity of the disease can range from a mild illness lasting only a few weeks (called acute infection), to a lifelong, serious (and potentially deadly) illness (called chronic infection.)

How common is Chronic Hepatitis B?

- Chronic Hepatitis B is known to be a global problem.
- More than 250 million people are chronically infected with Hepatitis B virus.
- Chronic infection causes more than 650 000 deaths each year. Approximately 2.5 million people in South Africa have chronic Hepatitis B.

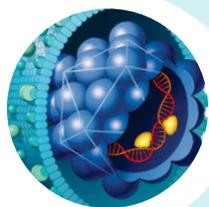
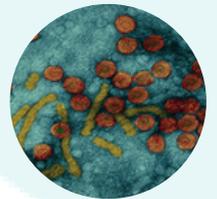
How likely is it that acute Hepatitis B will become chronic?

- The likelihood depends on the age at which a person becomes infected.
- The younger a person is when they are infected with Hepatitis B virus, the greater the chance that the infection will become chronic.
- Approximately 90% of infants who are infected around the time of birth will develop chronic infection.
- The risk decreases as you get older, dropping to around 5% if you are infected as an adult.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B virus is spread when blood, semen or other body fluids infected with the virus, enters the body of an uninfected person. Potentially hazardous activities include:

1. Having unprotected sex with an infected partner.
2. During birth. (When the virus spreads from the mother to her baby.)
3. Exposure to blood through needle sticks or other injuries caused by sharp instruments.
4. Sharing drug-injection equipment such as: needles and syringes. (Including sharing infected needles for acupuncture, piercings and tattooing.)
5. Sharing items such as Toothbrushes or Razors with an infected person
6. Direct contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person.
7. The majority of adults who are infected with Hepatitis B virus will develop symptoms, while the majority of young children do not.



Symptoms of acute Hepatitis B include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite, Nausea and Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark Urine and lighter (clay-coloured) faeces
- Yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes (called jaundice)