

## Hepatitis B: information for patients

You have been diagnosed with an infection caused by the hepatitis B virus. The virus is transmitted through unprotected sexual contact and through blood, for example by sharing syringes or needles. The virus can also be transmitted from mother to child in childbirth or through breastfeeding. Some people infected with hepatitis B will remain permanent carriers of the virus. Becoming a carrier is particularly common if the infection occurred in childhood. Of those infected in adulthood, 1 to 5% remain carriers of the virus. A carrier can transmit the virus to other people. If you remain a carrier of the virus, the infection and your liver status will be monitored with laboratory tests at your local health center.

### How can I prevent the transmission of the hepatitis B virus to others?

- Always use a **condom during sexual activity**, unless your partner has had hepatitis B or received a three-dose vaccination series against hepatitis B.
- **Inform the people living in your household and any sex partners that they are entitled to a free hepatitis B vaccine.** If you have acquaintances who use intravenous drugs, encourage them to get the free hepatitis B vaccine from a health center.
- Maintain good hygiene and keep your skin healthy.
  - If you have a bleeding wound, do not use public saunas, showers, or pools.
  - If your blood ends up in another person's wound, on broken skin, or mucous membranes, advise the person to wash it immediately with plenty of water and soap. Then, you must both contact a doctor.
- Keep your personal hygiene items (such as comb, toothbrush, and razor) separate from other people's hygiene items and do not lend them to or borrow them from others.
- Be aware of the possibility of infection when cleaning up blood stains:
  - Wipe any blood and other bodily secretions from surfaces with a disposable wipe using chlorine-based cleaner according to the instructions on the package and then wash your hands.
  - Dispose of any blood-stained products (such as menstrual pads) carefully by enclosing them in a separate plastic bag before placing them in the trash can. If another person handles any material stained with your blood, they must wear protective gloves.
  - Cutlery and dishes can be washed as normal.
  - Laundry can be washed in a washing machine as normal. If you have a piece of clothing that is stained with blood, use a pre-wash cycle and then wash the piece of clothing at the temperature recommended for the material. If machine washing is not possible, soak the bloody piece of clothing in cold water while wearing disposable gloves and then wash it at the temperature recommended for the material.
- Used injection equipment can be taken for disposal to a pharmacy or a needle exchange site for people using intravenous drugs (incl. Symppis, Terveys- ja sosiaalineuvontapiste Linkki, Vinkkari). Many of these sites also offer vaccines against hepatitis A and B. Sterilizing needles and syringes yourself does not completely eliminate the risk of infection.
- If a person is at a significant and repeated risk of being exposed to the hepatitis virus B, a blood test will be taken at least 6 to 8 weeks after the final vaccine dose to ensure adequate protection from the virus.

### Further information

THL, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: [Hepatitis B \(in Finnish\) \(www.thl.fi\)](https://www.thl.fi)