Keeping you and your child safe from hepatitis B

Overview of hepatitis B



Hepatitis B is an infection of the **liver** caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV).



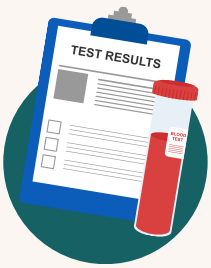
Hepatitis B can be a short-term infection (acute). It can also be a long-term infection (chronic), lasting 6 or more months.



Some people with hepatitis B have no symptoms and do not know they have the virus.



Chronic hepatitis B can damage the liver over time and may lead to liver scarring, liver cancer, or other serious health problems.



A blood test is needed to find out if someone has hepatitis B.



Hepatitis B can often be prevented with vaccination and other treatments.

How does hepatitis B spread?

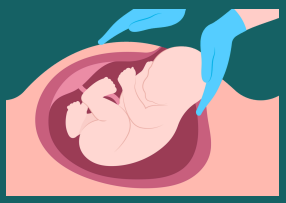
Hepatitis B spreads when blood or certain body fluids from a person with the virus enter another person's body.

It can spread through:

- Birth (vaginal delivery or cesarean section), when a pregnant person passes the virus to their baby



vaginal delivery



cesarean section



- Needlestick injuries
- Sex with a person who has hepatitis B
- Sharing needles, injection equipment, or personal items that may have blood on them, such as razors or toothbrushes
- Tattoos or piercings done with equipment that is not properly sterilized

Hepatitis B **does not** spread through everyday activities such as hugging, holding hands, sharing food, coughing, or sneezing.

Symptoms and diagnosis

Many people with hepatitis B have no symptoms. This is especially common in babies and young children.

Some hepatitis B symptoms may **mimic those of a cold or flu**, these include:



fatigue and weakness



fever



joint pain



loss of appetite



nausea and vomitting



stomach area pain

The **most obvious** symptoms of hepatitis B include:



dark urine



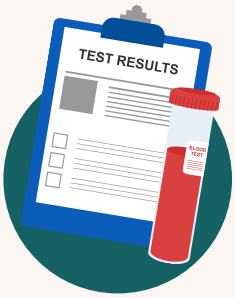
jaundice of the eyes
(yellowing of whites of eyes)



jaundice of the skin*
(yellowing of the skin)

**Depending on skin color, this change may be harder or easier to see.*

Because people may have no symptoms, **testing is an important way to find hepatitis B.** Hepatitis B is diagnosed with blood tests.



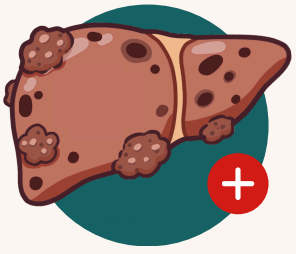
If a person tests positive, their health care provider may order additional tests to learn more about the infection and whether the liver has been affected.

Why does hepatitis B matter for pregnancy, babies, and children?

Hepatitis B can affect babies and young children differently than adults. The younger a person is when they become infected, the more likely the infection is to become chronic. **About 90% of babies who become infected with hepatitis B develop a chronic infection.**

Chronic hepatitis B may not cause symptoms for many years.
Over time, it can cause serious liver problems, including:

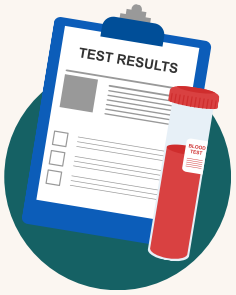
- Liver damage
- Cirrhosis (permanent liver scarring)
- Liver cancer
- Liver failure



Preventing hepatitis B during pregnancy and after birth

Preventing hepatitis B in babies and children helps protect their health for the future. Preventing hepatitis B in a baby starts during pregnancy.

Testing during pregnancy



All pregnant people should be tested for hepatitis B during **each pregnancy**, even if they have been vaccinated or tested in the past. Testing is usually done early in pregnancy.

If you have hepatitis B, tell your health care provider and the hospital or birth center where you plan to deliver. This helps the health care team prepare to protect your baby.

Protecting a newborn



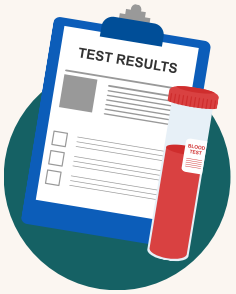
Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis B.

The hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective and has been used for many years.

After birth, all babies should receive the hepatitis B vaccine.

If a pregnant person has hepatitis B, their baby should receive 2 vaccines. The shots should be given within 12 hours to have the best chance at preventing infection.

Follow-up testing for babies



Babies born to a person with hepatitis B need follow-up testing after they complete the hepatitis B vaccine series.

When should I talk with a health care provider?

Talk with a health care provider if:

- You are pregnant and have not been tested for hepatitis B during your current pregnancy.
- You have questions about your child's hepatitis B vaccine or testing.
- You know or think you may have hepatitis B.
- You live with or have close contact with someone who has hepatitis B.
- Your baby or child has missed a recommended hepatitis B vaccine.
- Your baby was born to someone with hepatitis B.

Need help finding care?

The **Well Badger Resource Center** can help you find:

- health care providers,
- vaccination locations,
- testing services, and
- other health and social service resources in Wisconsin.



Contact the Well Badger Resource Center if you have questions or need help finding resources for yourself, your child, or your family.

Sources

1. Mayo Clinic. (2026, January 14). *Hepatitis B: Symptoms and causes.* Mayo Clinic. https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hepatitis-b/symptoms-causes/syc-20366802
2. Cleveland Clinic. (2026, July 27). *Hepatitis B: Symptoms, causes, and transmission.* https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/4246-hepatitis-b
3. World Health Organization. (2026, July 28). *Hepatitis B.* https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-b