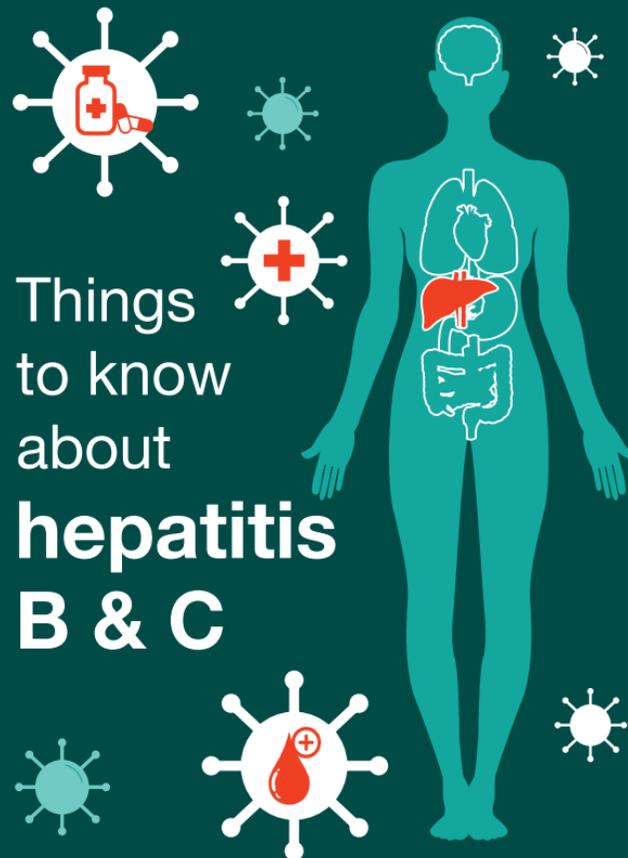




For more information on hepatitis see  
<http://www.worldhepatitisalliance.org/>



# Things to know about hepatitis B & C



This booklet was developed with funding from Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation



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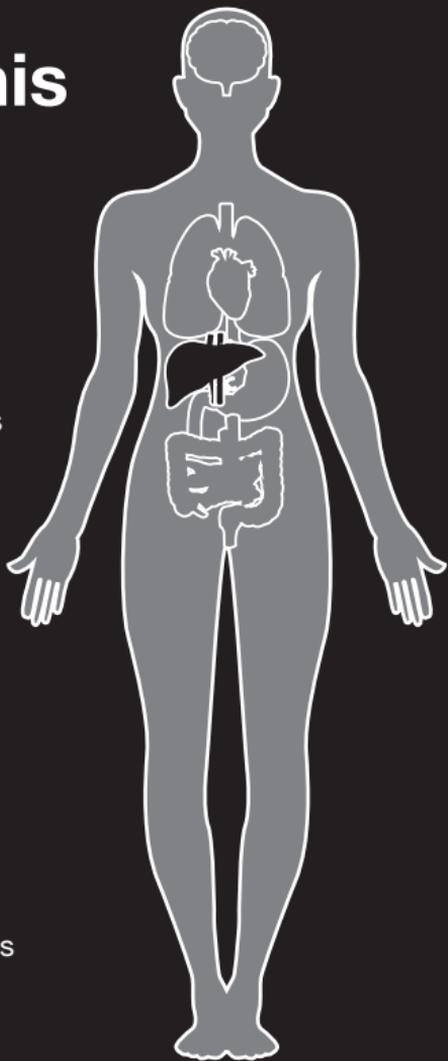
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# What is this booklet about?

This booklet has information on hepatitis B and C, two strains of viral hepatitis. It is designed as a reference book to give you general information and to help you make informed choices about testing, and looking after yourself no matter what your status is.

It starts with general information that applies to both hepatitis B and C, and then it has additional, slightly more detailed information on hepatitis B (see page 18) and hepatitis C (see page 24).



# What is hepatitis?

**Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver.**



The liver is a vital organ. It breaks down harmful substances that enter the body, such as drugs, medicines and alcohol. It stores substances such as vitamins, and releases these as your body needs them. It produces proteins that help your body function properly, such as those that help wounds heal. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its functioning can be affected.

Hepatitis can be caused by heavy alcohol use, toxins, medications, supplements and certain medical conditions. However, hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. The most common types of viral hepatitis are called A, B and C. This booklet covers hepatitis B and C.



**Hepatitis B is also known as hep B or HBV and hepatitis C is also known as hep C or HCV.**



# What are the symptoms?

Many people with hepatitis B or C do not have symptoms and so do not know they are infected. Hepatitis can be spread even if there aren't any symptoms.

If symptoms occur, they can include:



**FEVER**



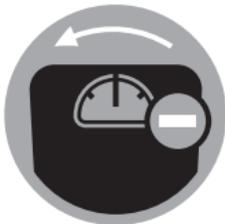
**TIREDSNESS**



**FEELING SICK/  
VOMITING**



**LOSS OF  
APPETITE**



**WEIGHT  
LOSS**



**SORE JOINTS**



**YELLOW SKIN  
AND EYES**



**PALE STOOLS,  
DARK URINE**



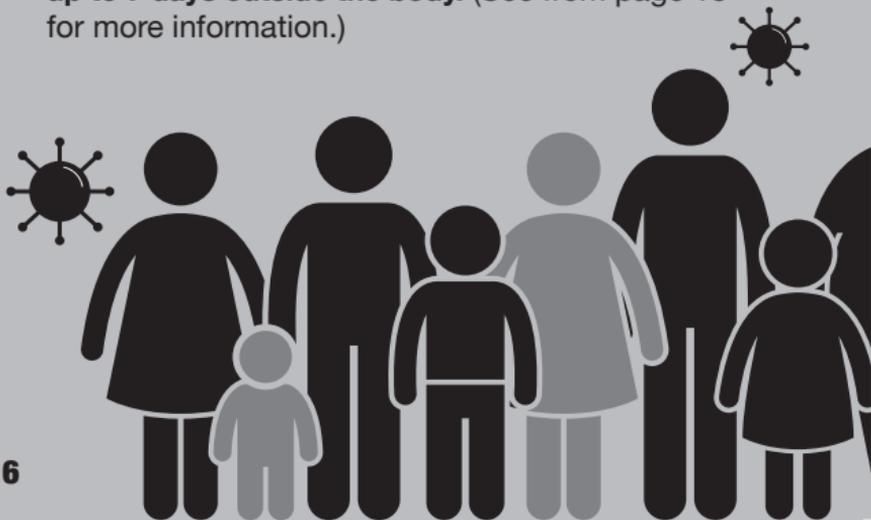
**STOMACH  
PAIN**

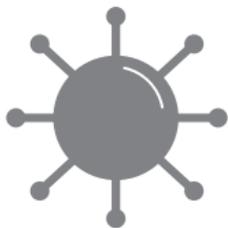
# How is the virus spread?



## Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is spread when blood or bodily fluids from a person infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone else. **The virus is 100 times more infectious than HIV and can last for up to 7 days outside the body.** (See from page 18 for more information.)





## Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is spread when blood from a person infected with the hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone else. **Hepatitis C is more infectious than HIV and can last for 4 days outside the body.** (See from page 24 for more information.)



# What do I do if I test positive?



+ Seek healthcare support

+ Look after your liver (page 10 and 11)

+ Encourage your sexual partner/s to be tested and, if applicable, vaccinated

+ Take care not to spread the infection (12 to 17)

+ Take care not to contract other illnesses or strains of hepatitis because being sick with more than one hepatitis virus can make you sicker quicker.



**'Contracting' the hepatitis virus means when a person who does not have the infection 'catches' the virus through contact with a person who is infected.**

# What happens if I have HIV and viral hepatitis?

When someone has HIV and viral hepatitis it is harder for their body to fight the viruses. This means that they are more likely to develop a chronic infection and complications:

- Liver inflammation and scarring (known as cirrhosis)
- Liver failure
- Liver cancer

**If you have HIV and viral hepatitis it is important to start ARVs as soon as possible and to take them every day for the rest of your life.**



# How do I protect myself and those around me?

## Protecting your liver

**If you have hepatitis, you need to be especially careful about looking after your liver.**



Alcohol increases the risk of developing complications of cirrhosis and liver failure. Avoid or reduce your intake as much as possible.

Drugs can cause liver damage. Amphetamines (including tik, cocaine), GBH and heroin are particularly hard on the liver. Avoid or reduce your use as far as possible, or change to a drug that is less likely to cause liver damage.

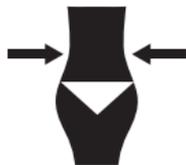


Always use any medication, including painkillers, as prescribed. Medication is usually broken down in the liver and taking incorrect amounts can further harm your liver. Avoid or reduce your intake as far as possible.



Try to be as healthy as possible. Enough sleep, exercise, drinking lots of water, and nutritious food all help your body fight infection.

If you are overweight, try to lose weight. Being overweight can cause fatty liver disease and diabetes, both of which harm your liver.



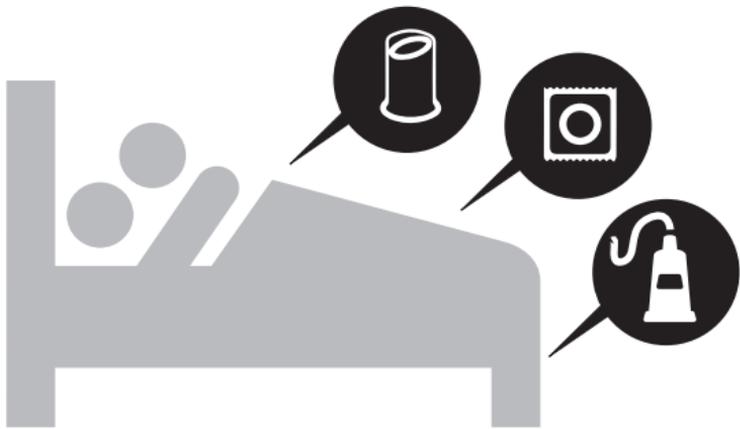
Be cautious of using over the counter 'liver tonics' or 'liver boosters' without checking with your health provider to ensure they are safe for you.

## Protecting yourself and your partner during sex

### HAVE SAFE SEX

Using condoms and water-based lube can reduce the chance of contracting hepatitis through sex.

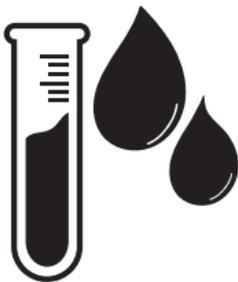
Using lube is especially important for anal sex.



**If you have hepatitis, using condoms and lube with your sex partner/s will dramatically lower the risk of transmission.**

### GET THE RIGHT TREATMENT

Treatment for hepatitis B or C lowers the chance that you pass on the infection through sex.



### GET TESTED

Encourage your sex partners to have a blood test for hepatitis B and C.

### GET VACCINATED

If your partner tests negative for hepatitis B, they can be vaccinated to protect them against the virus.



## Protecting yourself if you use drugs

The hepatitis B and C viruses are very infectious and can easily spread when a person comes into contact with surfaces, equipment, or objects that are contaminated with infected blood, even in amounts too small to see.

People who use drugs can get HIV, hepatitis C and B from:

### NEEDLES & SYRINGES

Sharing or reusing needles and syringes increases the chance of spreading HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Syringes with detachable needles increase this risk even more because they can retain more blood after they are used than syringes with fixed needles. If you inject drugs, ensure you always have your own new, clean needles and do not share with others.



## PREPARATION EQUIPMENT

Any equipment, such as cookers, cottons, water, ties, and alcohol swabs easily pick up these infections and spread them. Always ensure that you have your own equipment and do not share with others.



## OTHER DRUG-USE GEAR

Crack pipes, straws and other equipment can also transmit hepatitis viruses. Always use your own equipment and do not share with others.



## FINGERS

Fingers that come into contact with infected blood can spread hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Blood on fingers and hands can infect the injection site, cottons, cookers, ties and swabs.



## Protecting yourself if you inject drugs

**The best way to prevent viral hepatitis is to stop injecting. Switching to smoking drugs, or using opioid-substitution therapy can lower your risk for hepatitis C. If you are unable or unwilling to stop injecting drugs, there are steps you can take to reduce the risk of becoming infected.**



Always use sterile (new) needles, syringes and all equipment—cookers, cottons, water, ties, and alcohol swabs—every time you inject.

Set up a clean surface before putting down your injection equipment.



Do not divide and share drugs using equipment that has already been used.

Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water before and after injecting to remove blood or germs.



Clean injection site with alcohol or soap and water before injecting.



Apply pressure to injection site with a sterile pad to stop any bleeding after injecting. Do not use an alcohol swab as bleeding will continue.



Do not inject another person.

Only handle your own gear. If you do inject with other people, separate your equipment from others to avoid accidental sharing.

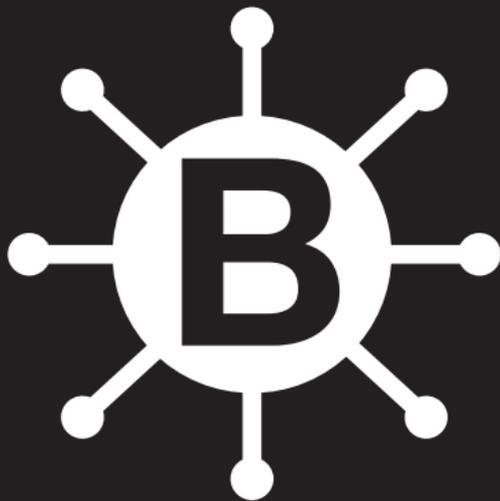
Dispose of your used needles safely by dropping them off at a needle disposal site.



### **Cleaning does not kill the hepatitis C and B virus.**

Bleaching, boiling, burning, or using common cleaning fluids, alcohol, or peroxide will not kill the hepatitis B and C virus. It is better not to attempt to sterilize drug-use equipment. Rather ensure you always have your own and do not share with others.

# Hepatitis



# How is hepatitis B spread?



Sex without a condom. Sexual risk is heightened with sex that damages the vaginal or anal lining, or when one has another sexually transmitted disease such as HIV.



Sharing personal hygiene equipment, such as toothbrushes, razors and nail clippers.



Mother-to-child transmission at birth.



Getting tattoos or body piercings with non-sterile equipment.

**Non-sterile means not free from any living organisms. Things can look clean, but still be non-sterile.**



# What are the stages of infection?



Hepatitis B is described in terms of **acute** and **chronic** infection.

**Acute** refers to the first six months after infection takes place. **Symptoms may develop during this phase, but don't always.** If hepatitis B is acquired during childhood, there are usually no symptoms and a high risk of developing a **chronic** infection.

Most adults manage to 'clear' (kill) the virus during the acute stage and are free of hepatitis afterwards. Some adults develop a **chronic** (long-term) infection. Over time this can cause serious health problems including liver inflammation and scarring, liver failure and liver cancer.

Symptoms, if they occur, are the same in both phases.

# How do I know if I have hepatitis B?

Testing is the only way to be sure of your hepatitis B status.

Blood tests are required to assess infection with hepatitis B.

Many people with the hepatitis B virus do not know they are infected because they do not have symptoms.

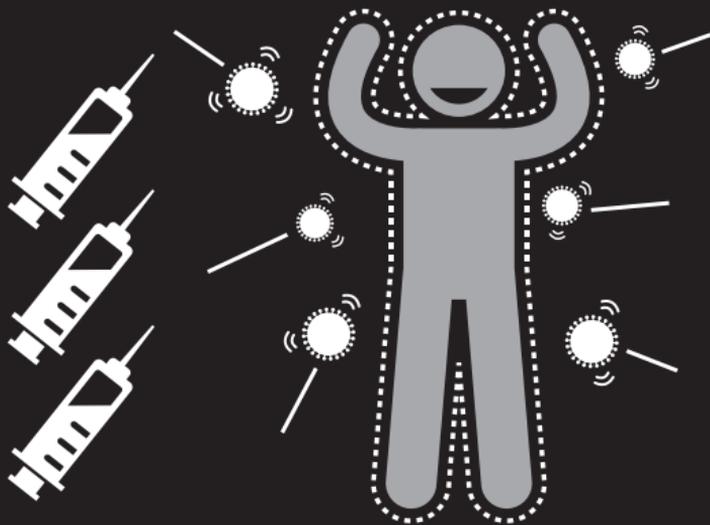
Antibody tests can tell if people have ever been vaccinated, or infected with hepatitis B. Antigen tests can tell whether you currently have hepatitis B.



**An antigen is anything that causes the body to produce an immune response to keep you healthy.**

# Can I be vaccinated?

Yes. Vaccination can protect you from contracting hepatitis B. For adults, the hepatitis B vaccine is given as a series of 3 injections over a period of 3 or 6 months. All three injections are needed for full protection. Booster injections, after one year, are sometimes advised.



# Is there a cure?



Chronic hepatitis B is very difficult to cure with current medications, and treatment is usually life-long. However, anti-viral therapy is able to manage the effects of the infection and prevent the development of complications such as liver inflammation and scarring and liver failure. It also reduces the risk of liver cancer.

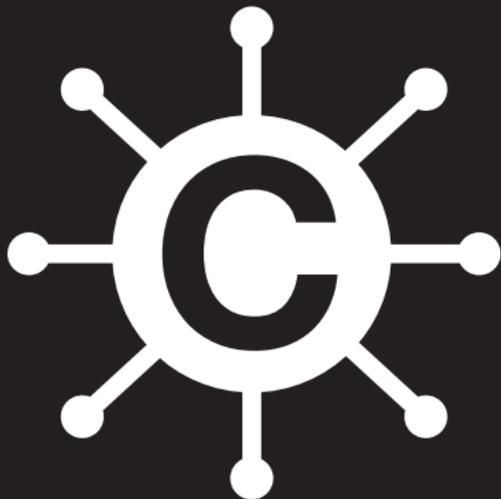
All patients with chronic hepatitis B need to be monitored their whole lives, but the need for, and the type of, therapy is determined by the

phase of the chronic hepatitis B infection and the individual's health status.

**It is very important to take your treatment as prescribed by your healthcare provider. Stopping treatment can result in a flare up of infection. Not taking the medication all the time can result in developing a hepatitis B infection that is resistant to medication.**

Being sick with more than one virus can make you sicker quicker.

# Hepatitis



# How is hepatitis C spread?



Sex without a condom. Sexual risk is heightened with damage to the vaginal or anal lining or when one has another sexually transmitted disease such as HIV.

Sharing of injecting drug equipment.



Blood or blood product transfusions that occurred pre-1992.



Non-sterile medical or dental interventions.

Mother-to-child transmission at birth.



Getting tattoos or body piercings with equipment that is non-sterile.



**Non-sterile means not free from any living organisms. Things can look clean, but still be non-sterile.**

# What are the stages of infection?



Hepatitis C is described in terms of **acute** and **chronic** infection.

**Acute** refers to the first six months after infection takes place. Few people experience obvious symptoms during this phase.

Many people who get infected with hepatitis C develop a **chronic** (long-term) infection. Some people manage to 'clear' (kill) the virus during the

acute stage and are free of hepatitis C afterwards.

Over time, **chronic** hepatitis C can cause serious health problems including liver inflammation and scarring, liver failure and even liver cancer.

# How do I know if I have hepatitis C?

Testing is the only way to be sure of your hepatitis C status. Many people with hepatitis C do not know they are infected because they do not have any symptoms. **Blood tests are required to assess infection with hepatitis C.**

Antibody tests are used to tell whether someone has ever been infected with hepatitis C. A positive test result does not mean you are still infected. It does not show whether you will develop chronic hepatitis C. A positive anti-body test must be followed by a PCR test to provide this information. The PCR test shows if you still have the virus in your

body. It can also detect the amount of virus present in your blood. If the test results are positive, another test will determine the type of hepatitis C infection, known as the genotype.

The genotype test determines which of the genotypes you have. This helps to determine what kind of treatment you require.



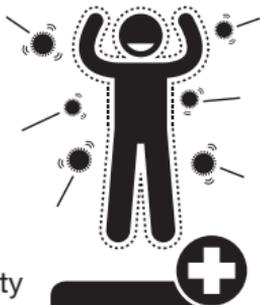
If someone is 'positive' for an infectious disease like viral hepatitis, it means that a test has detected that they have the virus in their body. If someone is 'negative' for a disease, it means the test has not detected the virus in his or her body.

# Can I be vaccinated?

No. There is currently no vaccination for hepatitis C.

## Is there a cure?

Hepatitis C can be cured in the majority of people. Direct-acting antivirals are taken for 12 – 24 weeks. However, this treatment is not yet registered in South Africa and getting it requires motivation from a specialist state hospital or by a private gastroenterologist. Treatment that takes longer (usually a year) is more easily available in the public sector.



**Treatment time depends on whether there is liver scarring.**

**It is very important to complete treatment if you start it. Not taking the medication properly can result in developing resistance to the hepatitis C treatment medications.**

**If cured, it is possible to become re-infected, so it is important to prevent future infection.**