



HEPATITIS B

The other Virus

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver which is caused by a virus. It is a serious disease. It can cause severe illness, from which it may take months to recover. Some people will never become carriers. They remain infectious to others and may also eventually develop cirrhosis or liver cancer.

Who is at risk?

Drugs users, their sexual partners, gay men, those having unsafe sex and babies born to infected mothers are at particular risk. However, anyone who comes in contact with infected blood or body fluid is also at risk.

Why should a person worry about Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is on the increase in Ireland, but treatment and vaccines are available. Early medical advice should be sought, as longterm consequences may result. A blood test which can be done by your General Practitioner or in any Genito Urinary Medicine (G.U.M.) clinic or in an Infectious Diseases Clinic (Dublin) or in the Outpatients Department of a hospital (on referral by your G.P.) will show whether you have been infected.

How do I catch Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B, like HIV is spread in the body fluids of someone who has been infected. Hepatitis B is much more infectious than HIV. It can be acquired by sexual activity, sharing needles, and exposure to blood and body fluids of an infected person. Tattoos and ear piercing can also be a risk. A mother can pass the virus on to her baby if she is

infected. It can also be transmitted through household contact especially with young children.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Many people have none at all, or just mild flu-like symptoms. Others may feel tired and physically sick. Some may experience jaundice when their eyes and skin become yellow and their urine turns dark. Some will carry the virus for many years without ever developing severe liver disease; others will go on to develop chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis or cancer.

What treatment is available?

When you first have Hepatitis B you will be advised to rest and avoid alcohol. In most cases suitable treatment will result in complete recovery. However, some go on to become carriers and even then there are a number of treatments which may help. If you think you may have been at risk of hepatitis or have symptoms, it is important to see your doctor immediately.

How can I avoid catching Hepatitis B?

The risk of Hepatitis B can be reduced in the following ways: -

- a) SAFER SEXUAL PRACTICES - Hepatitis B is often transmitted through sexual intercourse. It is important for everyone to adopt safer sexual practices. Safer sex and correct use of a condom can help protect you from Hepatitis B.
- b) SAFER DRUG USE – If you inject drugs never share needles or syringes with anyone else. New needles and syringes are available from needles exchanges.
- c) GOOD HYGIENE – This is essential when dealing with blood or body fluids. Measures such as hand washing with detergent, wearing glove and safe disposal of infected material are essential. If you are caring for someone with Hepatitis B, check with your doctor what safety measures you should take.

DON'T FORGET THAT THESE MEASURES WILL HELP PROTECT YOU FROM HIV AS WELL

- d) If you are thinking of having a baby and may be at risk of Hepatitis B speak to your doctor so your baby can be protected by vaccination at birth.
- e) VACCINATION – There is an effective vaccine available against Hepatitis B which usually offers a high degree of protection. You can find out more about the vaccine from your G.P., public

health nurse, outreach worker, Infectious Diseases Clinic or Genito Urinary Medicine (G.U.M.) Clinic.

Are there other types of Hepatitis Virus?

There are a number of different Hepatitis Viruses. Some are transmitted in a similar way to Hepatitis B and HIV. Others are acquired from contaminated food or poor hygiene. These may cause similar symptoms to Hepatitis and need medical attention.

Further information on Hepatitis B is available from the following centers: -

N.B. G.U.M. = Genito Urinary Medicine

Baggot St Clinic (Needle Exchange),
19 Haddington Road Dublin 4,
Tel: (01) 6602149

Infectious Diseases Clinic or Genito Urinary Medicine Clinic,
Mater Misericordiae Hospital,
Eccles Street Dublin 7,
Tel: (01) 8304488

Infectious Diseases Clinic,
Beaumont Hospital Dublin 9,
Tel: (01) 8377755

G.U.M. Clinic,
St. James's Hospital,
James's Street Dublin 8,
Tel: (01) 4535245 / (01) 4537941,
Ext 2315/2316 by appointment only

National Drug Treatment Centre,
Trinity Court Pearse Street Dublin 2,
Tel: (01) 6771122

Ashling Clinic,
Ballyfermot Dublin 10,
Tel: (01) 6232200

Cork,
G.U.M. Clinic,
Victoria Hospital ,
Tel: (021) 966844

Waterford,
G.U.M. Clinic,
Waterford Regional Hospital,
Ardkeen,
Tel: (051) 73321

Galway,
G.U.M. Clinic,
Tel: (091) 25200

Limerick,
G.U.M. Clinic,
Regional Hospital ,
Dooradoyle,
Tel: (061) 301111

Sligo,
G.U.M. Clinic,
Sligo Regional Hospital,
Tel: (071) 70473

Belfast
G.U.M. Clinic,
Royal Victoria Hospital,
Tel: (080232) 320159

Derry,
G.U.M. Clinic,
Altnagelvin Hospital,
Tel: (080504) 45171 / (080504) 45257