



A guide to hepatitis B:

Testing, treatment and staying healthy

About this resource

This guide is to help you understand the process from being tested for hepatitis B (often called hep B) to living well with chronic (life-long) hep B. It is designed to help people who are at risk of, or have been recently diagnosed with hep B.

Information provided in this guide is for general information only and not intended to replace medical advice. Hepatitis Australia encourages all readers to seek independent medical advice before making any decisions based on the information provided.

I would like a hep B test



I think we should test for hep B



TEST RESULTS



NEGATIVE
Immune



You're vaccinated, immune and can't get hep B



NEGATIVE
Not immune



Get vaccinated



CLEARED
Immune



Test family and people you live with



POSITIVE



Get liver tests

Test family, partners and people you live with



See your doctor every 6 to 12 months

Eat healthy food, exercise and reduce alcohol and cigarette consumption



Get treatment if needed

1

Work out if you should get a hep B test

THE FOLLOWING GROUPS OF PEOPLE SHOULD GET A HEP B TEST:¹

- families, partners and people who live with someone who has hep B
- people born in one of the regions coloured orange in the map below²
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people
- pregnant women
- infants and children older than 9 months born to mothers who have hep B
- people about to undergo chemotherapy, immunosuppressive therapy or dialysis
- health professionals who perform exposure-prone procedures
- members of the armed forces
- people who have HIV and/or hep C
- people with multiple sexual partners who have not been vaccinated
- people who have ever injected drugs
- people who have ever been to prison
- men who have sex with men
- sex workers
- some people who have signs or symptoms of liver damage
- people with a family history of liver disease.

REGIONS WITH MODERATE TO HIGH PREVALENCE OF HEPATITIS B





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Ask your doctor for a hep B test

Hep B tests are not part of normal blood tests. If you don't know if you have been tested before, you should ask your doctor. Your GP will need to do a blood test, which will tell them whether you have hep B and if not, whether you are immune to hep B.

As the range of hep B tests can be confusing, your GP may appreciate being pointed to this handy decision-making aid developed by ASHM:

<https://ashm.org.au/products/product/1976963402>

TRANSLATION SERVICES

If you need help to communicate with your doctor, you can have a translator come to your appointment or translate over the phone. This is a free service through TIS (Translating and Interpreting Service) National.³ You should tell the doctor's clinic that you will need a translator when you make the appointment.

While family and friends can be very good for support when you are seeing a doctor, we recommend you get a professional interpreter to help you communicate with your doctor. Health decisions can be difficult to make and it is important you are able to understand everything to help you make the right decision. TIS National interpreters are trained professionals and have lots of experience interpreting complex information.

Website: www.tisnational.gov.au

Phone 131 450 to access a telephone interpreter for the cost of a local call.

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Get your test results.

A HEP B TEST COULD SHOW ONE OF FOUR DIFFERENT RESULTS.⁴

1
NEGATIVE,
IMMUNE
(VACCINATED)

You are immunised against hep B and you cannot get it.

YOU DO NOT NEED TO FOLLOW THE NEXT STEPS

2
NEGATIVE,
NOT IMMUNE

You have never had hep B and never been vaccinated. You can ask your doctor about getting vaccinated so you cannot get hep B in future.



3
CLEARED,
IMMUNE

You have had hep B in the past, but your body cleared it naturally. You do not have chronic hep B. You should consider telling your family, partner and people you live with so they can get tested. Your doctor can contact them anonymously if you are worried about telling them.

It is important to note that people who have cleared hep B could get a severe flare up when treated with chemotherapy or immunosuppressive medications. You may need additional treatment for hep B if you go on these medications.

4
HEP B
POSITIVE

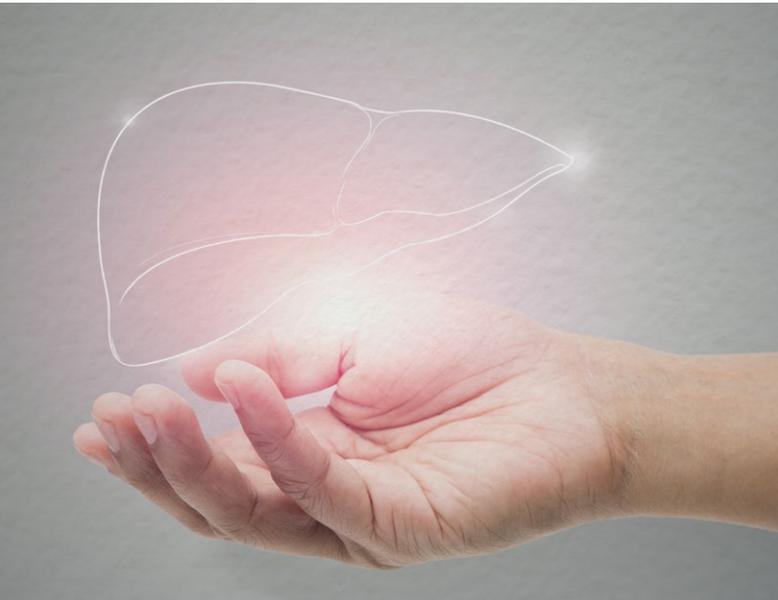
It is likely you have chronic hep B. Chronic hep B is a lifelong condition but there are things you can do to help you stay healthy.

FOLLOW THE NEXT STEPS

Left untreated, hep B can damage your liver and lead to cirrhosis (severe scarring of the liver), liver disease, liver cancer and liver failure. There is no cure for chronic hep B, but if it is damaging your liver, there is treatment you can take to control and reduce the harmful effects of the virus.

If you were exposed to the virus recently, you will need another test in six months to determine if you have a chronic hep B infection.





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Get liver tests

Your doctor will need to perform some tests to check how your liver is functioning. This will most likely include some blood tests and an ultrasound or Fibroscan® (a painless test that uses vibrations to see how stiff the liver is).⁴

This will help your doctor understand how hep B is affecting you, and whether you need to start treatment.

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Test family, partners and people you live with

Hep B is most commonly transmitted at birth. It can also be transmitted through blood-to-blood contact or sex without a condom. You should consider telling your family, partners and people you live with that you have hep B so they can get tested and vaccinated.

Having hep B **does not** mean you can't have a family or do things like sharing meals with your family and friends. The best way your family and friends can protect themselves against getting hep B is by getting vaccinated.

Your doctor can contact them anonymously if you are worried about telling them. For more information about confidentiality and disclosure, visit www.hepatitisaustralia.com/Listing/Category/your-rights-and-responsibilities

YOU **CANNOT** TRANSMIT HEP B THROUGH:



hugging
or kissing



sharing food
and eating
utensils



eating food
made by
someone
with hep B



insect or
animal bites,
including
mosquitoes



sharing
bathrooms,
showers or
toilets



coughing
or sneezing

If you are pregnant and have hep B, your baby should get an injection within 12 hours of being born. This injection contains hep B immunoglobulin, which are antibodies that help the immune system to fight the virus. This injection, together with the hep B vaccine course started at the same time, is very effective at protecting the baby against hep B. Some women can also benefit from treatment during pregnancy to reduce the risk of passing the virus on to their baby.⁵

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Eat healthy food, exercise and reduce alcohol and cigarette consumption

It is also important to take care of your body by eating healthy food, exercising and avoiding alcohol and cigarettes.

Alcohol, cigarettes and being overweight can damage your liver, which is particularly bad if you have hep B because the virus can also damage your liver. If you need help to change your diet or cut back on alcohol or cigarettes, you should talk to your doctor.⁶

You should also talk to your doctor about any medicines or supplements you take, including herbal remedies and traditional Chinese medicines, as some of these can be bad for your liver if you have hep B.⁷



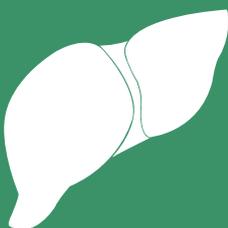
7

Visit your doctor regularly

It is very important that you visit your doctor every six months or as advised to check if there is any liver damage. People with hep B often do not have any signs or symptoms. If you wait until you feel sick, the virus may already have caused a lot of harm, which could be irreversible. The only way to know is to have regular liver checks.⁵

If the virus starts causing damage to your liver, there is medicine you can take to control and reduce the harmful effects of the virus.

You might need to visit your doctor more frequently if recommended, particularly in the first year of treatment.



DID YOU KNOW?

The liver doesn't have any nerves that feel pain. There is a capsule (or bag) of tissue around the liver that can feel pain if it is stretched. This is part of the reason why you might not have any symptoms from hep B until your liver is severely damaged.⁸



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Get treatment if needed

Not everyone with hep B needs treatment because the virus goes through different phases. During some phases the virus can be highly active and cause injury to your liver. When you visit your doctor for a liver check, they will be able to work out how active the virus is with blood tests and if you need to start treatment.⁵

PHASES OF HEPATITIS B

SILENT	PHASE 1	Immune tolerance	Hepatitis B virus is replicating but there is no active liver damage.
DAMAGE	PHASE 2	Immune clearance	Hepatitis B virus is attacking the immune system and the immune system is fighting back. Liver is getting damaged.
CONTROL	PHASE 3	Immune control	Immune system has virus under control and there is no further liver damage.
ESCAPE	PHASE 4	Immune escape	Virus is active again and liver is being damaged.

The most common medications for treating hepatitis B are anti-viral tablets, which you take every day for a year or longer, as directed by your doctor.

If you need treatment for hep B, you may need to visit a specialist unless your GP is experienced with hepatitis B treatment. Your GP will provide you with a referral to a liver specialist if needed.⁹

REFERENCES: 1. ASHM. (2012, September). [Hepatitis B and Primary Care Providers](#). Retrieved from ASHM. 2. ASHM. (2016, March). [Indications for HBV testing](#). Retrieved from ASHM 3. Department of Home Affairs. (n.d.). TIS National. Retrieved from www.tisnational.gov.au/ 4. Hepatitis NSW. (2018, May 11). [Hep B testing for adults](#). Retrieved from Hepatitis NSW. 5. ASHM. (2019). [Hepatitis B](#). Retrieved from All good. 6. Hepatitis Queensland. (2019). [Living with Hepatitis](#). Retrieved from Hepatitis Queensland. 7. hep. (2019, March 4). [Natural Remedies and Hepatitis B](#). Retrieved from hepmag. 8. Stöppler, M. (2017, January 24). [Medical Definition of Liver Pain](#). Retrieved from MedicineNet. 9. Hep B Help. (2019). [New HBV Diagnosis – what now?](#) Retrieved from Hep B Help.