



Information on hepatitis B for patients and their family members

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a global contagious virus infection of the liver. The progress of the disease is not identical in all people. Possible symptoms include discomfort in the upper abdomen, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, fatigue or jaundice (yellow-coloured eyes, yellow-coloured skin and mucous membranes). It is also possible, however, that no discomfort at all occurs. The infection generally heals by itself but in around ten percent of cases it may cause chronic inflammation of the liver. This results in the liver being increasingly destroyed, which may cause cirrhosis of the liver and in some cases the development of liver cancer (hepatocellular carcinoma).

Hepatitis B is a notifiable disease in Germany under the Infection Protection Law.

Modes of transmission

Both the acute and the chronic form of hepatitis B can be contagious. The virus is transferred from person to person most frequently by blood or by sexual intercourse, but in rare cases also through other bodily fluids.

Sexual intercourse: This is a very common transmission mode of the hepatitis B virus. The sexual transmission risk can be almost completely eradicated by the use of condoms.

Contact with blood containing the hepatitis B virus: For example, by contact with bleeding injuries, using the same syringes (for example for drug abuse), nail scissors, razor blades, razors or toothbrushes.

Infection at birth: A mother with hepatitis B may infect her child during birth by blood contact.

Tattoos, acupuncture and ear piercing: The hepatitis B virus can also be transmitted if these procedures are carried out in unhygienic conditions.

Possible treatment and protection methods

Medicine has made great advances over the last few years in the possible treatments of the hepatitis B infection. Your doctor will decide whether your hepatitis B infection requires treatment and exactly what treatment that should be. This depends on the result of several examinations (ultrasound examination of the liver, blood tests for liver enzyme values, antibodies against hepatitis B virus components and for antigens of the hepatitis B virus or its DNS).

A hepatitis B vaccination provides reliable protection against infection. There is a general vaccination recommendation by the Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) for children. STIKO also recommends vaccinations for adults with the appropriate indications (for example for those who are HIV positive, dialysis patients, people in contact with those suffering from hepatitis B in a family/shared accommodation, people whose sexual behaviour involves a high infection risk, such as men who have sex with men, staff at medical facilities and First Aiders). Contact your attending physician for an individual risk assessment.

Rules to protect other people from infection

- There is generally no risk of infection from normal social contact (such as shaking hands and holding conversations).
- Tell other people that if they come into contact with your blood or other bodily fluids (for example when giving you First Aid, and in particular when treating wounds) they should wear disposable gloves.
- Inform any intimate partners about your hepatitis B infection.
- Use condoms when having sexual intercourse.
- Your family members and other members of your household should all have a hepatitis B vaccination.
- You must not donate any blood or organs if you are infected with hepatitis B.
- For pregnant women with hepatitis B, a hepatitis B vaccination given to the child immediately after birth may prevent the infection being transmitted to the child.
- Notify your attending physician and dentist about your hepatitis B infection.
- If the infection becomes worse, contact your attending physician and notify him or her about your hepatitis B infection.

Please note that the deliberate infection of another person with the hepatitis B virus may be deemed to be actual bodily harm under the German Criminal Code and you may be punished as a result.

If you have any further questions please contact your attending physician.

Background information and information sheets available on the Internet

- Bayerisches Landesamt für Gesundheit und Lebensmittelsicherheit (LGL) (Bavarian Health and Food Safety Authority) at www.lgl.bayern.de, here http://www.lgl.bayern.de/gesundheit/infektionsschutz/asylbewerber_gesundheit/index.htm (only available in German).
- Robert Koch-Institut at www.rki.de at <http://www.rki.de/asylsuchende> (only available in German).
- Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung (Federal Centre for Health Information) at <http://www.bzga.de>, here <http://www.infodienst.bzga.de/?id=Seite3233>, <http://www.infektionsschutz.de/erregersteckbriefe/> (available in German, English, Arabic, Turkish, French and Russian).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/hepb/default.htm> (only available in English and Spanish).
- World Health Organization (WHO) at <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/communicable-diseases/hepatitis> (only available in English).
- Ständige Impfkommision (STIKO) (Standing Committee on Vaccination) at http://www.rki.de/DE/Content/Kommissionen/STIKO/Empfehlungen/Impfempfehlungen_node.html.
- Deutsche Leberstiftung (German Liver Foundation) at <http://www.deutsche-leberstiftung.de/hilfe/informationsmaterialien/faltblaetter> (information for patients and their family members, available in English, Arabic, Greek, Italian, Croatian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Serbian, Turkish and Vietnamese).
- Immunization Action Coalition at http://www.immunize.org/vis/vis_hepatitis_b.asp (information about hepatitis B and hepatitis B vaccination for patients, available in many different languages: Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Hindi, Somali, etc.).