

Hepatitis

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Hepatitis is caused by a virus. Hepatitis is sometimes called jaundice and there are various variants of hepatitis. Hepatitis B is what is primarily meant when hepatitis is referred to as a sexually transmitted infection. Hepatitis B is spread through unprotected vaginal intercourse, anal sex and oral sex. The virus can also be passed on easily in contact with blood and small quantities of blood are generally sufficient for this to happen. If you use drugs and share syringes and needles with someone who is carrying the virus, you are likely to catch hepatitis.

SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS B

The hepatitis virus causes inflammation of the liver, and it can take a long time for you to become ill after getting hepatitis B. The period between getting the infection and the outbreak of the disease can vary from two months to six months. The symptoms are usually a high temperature, joint pains, tiredness, nausea and poor appetite. Since the infection attacks the liver, the skin and the whites of the eyes can become yellow. Alternatively you may have no symptoms at all. Half the people who catch hepatitis don't notice any symptoms.

GETTING TESTED FOR HEPATITIS B

Testing for hepatitis B is free. You get tested by giving a blood sample. You can be a carrier of hepatitis B without being aware of it. You should therefore get tested if you suspect that you have hepatitis B. Your sexual partner must also take a test if you have hepatitis.

TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis B. Instead, the symptoms that appear are often treated. But you can vaccinate yourself against both hepatitis A and B. The vaccination gives you very good protection for a long period of time against both these forms of hepatitis. If you are vaccinated before travelling, you should have all the injections included in the vaccination to obtain full protection.

IMPORTANT POINTS ABOUT HEPATITIS

Hepatitis generally clears up by itself, but some people get a chronic infection and carry the hepatitis B virus for the rest of their lives. In this case the person is infectious all the time, even if no symptoms appear. Chronic hepatitis also poses a higher risk of developing liver cancer. There is medical treatment that can slow down a chronic infection.

During pregnancy mothers-to-be are offered a test for hepatitis. The purpose of this is to protect your child from infection.

These texts were produced in 2009 by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare and the texts have been checked by HANS CARLBERG, consultant physician at Sösam, the Unit for Sexual Health at the Dermatology and Venereology Clinic, Södersjukhuset (Stockholm South General Hospital); HANS FREDLUND, Associate Professor and consultant in communicable diseases, Örebro County Council, Örebro University Hospital; LENA MARIONS, Associate Professor and consultant physician at the Gynaecology Clinic, Karolinska University Hospital.

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