

SYMPTOMS

Hepatitis B is a viral infection affecting the liver, transmitted mainly through sexual contact with an infected person. The infection is an acute process, however it can develop into a chronic condition, especially if younger than 6 years; most patients above this age will recover completely from HBV ^[1]. Most cases are asymptomatic, however symptoms may present an average of 90 days post-infection, including ^[2]:

- Fever and fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal Pain
- Dark urine
- Pale stools
- Yellowing of skin and sclera

HBV infection is usually mild, unless infection is fulminant, which is rare, however carries the risk of acute liver failure, which can be fatal ^[1].



TRANSMISSION

Distribution and Spread

Risk of hepatitis B infection is greater across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe ^[3]. It is mainly transmitted through sexual contact and bodily fluids, including saliva, menstrual, vaginal, and seminal secretions; however it can also be transmitted through blood and blood products. Infection can also occur through vertical transmission from a mother to her baby during delivery. Moreover, exposure can occur through needlestick injuries, tattooing and piercing with infected needles. Unvaccinated people who have several sexual partners are more likely to transmit sexually ^[2].

RECOMMENDATION

Treatment

Treatment is not specific, but rather focuses on alleviating symptoms, through adequate rest, hydration and pain-killers. As mentioned previously, most cases will resolve on their own within a few weeks, up to six months ^[1]. However, in severe or long-standing cases hospitalisation may be required. Note that chronic HBV infection increases the risk for liver cirrhosis and liver cancer ^[2].

Prevention

The best method of prevention is vaccination, with this being recommended to all adults between ages 18-59, with testing being recommended at least once throughout adulthood ^[1]. Childhood vaccination is essential considering that 95% of HBV become chronic in children under 5 ^[2]. Precautionary measures should also be taken, including:

- Antiviral prophylaxis to prevent vertical transmission
- Avoid sharing possibly blood-stained items, like razors and needles.
- Practicing safe sex using condoms and dams
- Avoid direct and blood contact with infected individuals

1. Hepatitis B Questions and Answers for Health Professionals [Internet]. CDC 2019. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/hbvfaq.htm> (accessed March 21, 2023).
2. Hepatitis B [Internet]. World Health Organization. 2021. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-b> (accessed March 21, 2023).
3. Overview - Hepatitis B [Internet]. NHS. 2019. Available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis-b/> (accessed March 21, 2023).