

What is hepatitis?

Inflammation of the liver, usually caused by viruses like hepatitis A, B, and C. Hepatitis can have non-infectious causes too, including heavy drinking, drugs, allergic reactions, or obesity.

ABC's of Viral Hepatitis

Viral hepatitis refers to infections caused by viruses that directly attack the liver. Chronic cases of viral hepatitis can lead to life-threatening liver cirrhosis (or scarring), liver failure and liver cancer. The most common forms of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, hepatitis D and hepatitis E. Acute hepatitis caused by hepatitis virus A, B, E. Chronic hepatitis is caused by hepatitis virus B, C.

Acute hepatitis:

Acute hepatitis caused by hepatitis A, B, and E. Acute hepatitis commonly presented with fever, malaise, bodyache followed by jaundice (yellowish discoloration of eye & urine). Both hepatitis A and hepatitis E are spread by the faecal - oral route.

Transmission of Hepatitis A & E:

Type of Viral Hepatitis	Mode of Transmission / Prevention
Hepatitis A (HAV)	Contaminated food and water. There is a safe HAV vaccine.
Hepatitis E (HEV)	Contaminated food and water. There is no vaccine.

Prevention of transmission of hepatitis A and hepatitis E:

The risk of infection and transmission can be reduced by:

- maintaining quality standards for public water supplies;
- establishing proper disposal systems to eliminate sanitary waste.

On an individual level, infection risk can be reduced by:

- maintaining hygienic practices such as hand washing with safe water, particularly before handling food;
- avoiding drinking water and/or ice of unknown purity;
- avoiding eating uncooked shellfish, and uncooked fruits or vegetables that are not peeled or that are prepared by people living in unhygienic place

Vaccination against hepatitis A:

Available

Hepatitis B Virus and Hepatitis C Virus

Both hepatitis B & C cause inflammation of the liver.

Transmission: Both hepatitis B & C results from exposure to infectious blood or body fluids containing blood. Possible forms of transmission include sexual contact, blood transfusions and transfusion with other human blood products, re-use of contaminated needles and syringes, and vertical transmission from mother to child.

Acute vs. chronic hepatitis B

Hepatitis B infection may be either short-lived (acute hepatitis B) or long lasting (chronic hepatitis B).

- **Acute hepatitis B infection** lasts less than six months. Acute hepatitis B commonly manifested as jaundice.
- **Chronic hepatitis B infection** lasts six months or longer. When body immune system can't fight off the virus, hepatitis B infection may become lifelong and leads to chronic hepatitis B. Chronic (long-lasting) hepatitis B can cause liver cell damage, which can lead to cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and cancer. Chronic infection may go undetected for decades until a person becomes seriously ill from liver disease.

Acute vs. chronic hepatitis C

- Acute hepatitis C infection causes acute symptoms in 15% of cases. Most cases of acute infection are not associated with jaundice.
- Chronic infection: About 80% of those exposed to the virus develop a chronic infection. Most experience minimal or no symptoms during the initial period of the infection. Chronic hepatitis C can be associated with fatigue. After many years infected persons may develop cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Is there vaccine to prevent hepatitis B?

Yes! Hepatitis B is preventable through vaccination. WHO recommends that all infants receive the hepatitis B vaccine as soon as possible after birth, preferably within 24 hours.

The complete vaccine course induces protective antibody levels in more than 95% of infants, children and young adults. Protection lasts at least 20 years and is possibly lifelong.

Is there vaccine to prevent hepatitis C?

No

Diagnosis:

The hepatitis B surface antigen (*HBsAg*) is used to screen for the presence of hepatitis B infection.

Hepatitis C infection detected by presence of antibodies against the hepatitis C virus.

Things NOT to do (to be avoided by hepatitis infected persons)

Avoid alcohol intake.

Do not share with anyone toothbrushes, razors, needles, syringes, nail files, clippers, scissors, or any object that may come into contact with your blood or body fluids.

Do not donate blood, plasma, body organs, tissue, or sperm.

Children and adults who are HBsAg-positive:

- Can participate in all activities including contact sports
- Should not be excluded from daycare or school participation and should not be isolated from other children
- Can share food, utensils or kiss others