



Hepatitis B and C

What are Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C?

"Hepatitis" means inflammation of the liver.

In Bermuda, the most common causes of viral hepatitis are Hepatitis B virus (HBV), and Hepatitis C virus (HCV). Each is separate from the other and spread in slightly different ways.

How are Hepatitis B and C spread?

Spread of HBV and HCV usually occurs when blood, semen, or another body fluid from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected. For example: through sexual contact, by sharing needles or equipment to inject drugs, or from an infected woman to her newborn at birth.

What is the incubation period for Hepatitis B and C?

HBV and HCV can begin as a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed (acute infection), but in some people, the virus remains in the body, resulting in long-term liver problems (chronic infection).

What are the signs and symptoms of Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C?

Many people can have hepatitis infection without having symptoms or feeling sick.

Symptoms of acute hepatitis, if they appear, can include: fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain, and, jaundice (yellow color in the skin or the eyes).

Should a person with Hepatitis B or C be isolated?

No. However, precautions must be taken when at risk of coming into contact with the body fluids of infected persons (e.g. Condom/ barrier method use, gloves, proper needle handling, etc.).

How do you know if you have Hepatitis B or C and is there a treatment?

Blood tests are used to detect viral hepatitis. The virus can be detected even if a person has no symptoms.

Treatment for viral hepatitis varies. Both chronic HBV and HCV infection can be treated with antiviral medications. For HBV, treatment can delay or limit the effects of liver damage. Newly approved treatments for HCV infection are shorter, have fewer side effects, and now can cure the disease.

People with viral hepatitis should seek the care of a doctor with experience treating viral Hepatitis so that they can be monitored regularly for signs of liver disease and evaluated for possible treatment.

Are there vaccinations available against these diseases?

There is a vaccine to prevent Hepatitis B; however, **there are none for Hepatitis C**. If you or your child has not been vaccinated against Hepatitis B, contact your physician or visit the Child Health Immunization Clinic located at the Hamilton Health Centre, 67 Victoria Street, Hamilton, to be immunized as soon as possible.

Adapted from:

"Viral Hepatitis." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009 (<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/>, accessed 5 May 2014)