

ENGLISH



INFORMATION FACT SHEET FOR
TIBETAN COMMUNITY

HEPATITIS B

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that may cause liver inflammation. It can lead to permanent liver damage and liver cancer.

“Hepatitis” means inflammation (swelling) of the liver.

Inflammation of the liver can be caused by viruses, drugs, drinking too much alcohol or other medical problems.

In Australia, the most common viruses that can cause hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

How common is hepatitis B?

One in twelve people have chronic hepatitis B or hepatitis C world-wide.

In Australia in 2011, it was estimated that 218 000 people were living with chronic hepatitis B. Almost half of these people did not know they had hepatitis B. Many of these people were born in countries where hepatitis B is common.

Hepatitis B is common in many Asian communities including the Tibetan community.

What is chronic hepatitis B?

Chronic hepatitis B is when you have the hepatitis B virus in your blood for more than six months.

The only way to know if you have chronic hepatitis B is by having the correct blood test.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Most people with chronic hepatitis B do not have any specific symptoms. Many people do not even know they have the virus.

Even when people do not have any symptoms of hepatitis B, the virus may damage the liver.

How do you get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is found in body fluids such as blood, semen and vaginal fluids of an infected person.

Hepatitis B can only be passed on when body fluids from an infected person enter another person’s body. Even very small amounts of fluid can spread the virus.

Most adults with chronic hepatitis B got the virus at birth from their mother who also had hepatitis B or in early childhood.

In Australia, all babies are vaccinated against hepatitis B after birth.

Other ways you can get hepatitis B are:

- By having sex without a condom with a person who has hepatitis B.
- By sharing personal items such as razors, toothbrushes or other items that may carry blood.
- Through injections, medical and dental procedures in countries where equipment is not sterilised (cleaned) properly. In Australia, these procedures are safe.
- Through blood transfusions in countries where blood is not checked for hepatitis B. In Australia, the blood is always checked for hepatitis B so the procedure is safe.
- Through traditional practices that may involve blood, e.g. acupuncture.

- Using tattooing equipment that has not been sterilised properly. This includes cosmetic tattooing.
- Sharing drug injecting equipment.

Most people who get hepatitis B when they are an adult recover completely and do not need any treatment.

You cannot get hepatitis B from:

- coughing
- hugging
- insect bites
- sharing food, cooking pots or eating utensils such as knives, forks, spoons
- sharing bathroom and toilet facilities
- swimming pools

What can Tibetan families do about hepatitis B?

Talk to your doctor and ask for a blood test for Hepatitis B.

The test will show:

- If you have chronic hepatitis B.
- If you are protected from the virus because you have had a vaccination or have had previous contact with the virus.
- If you need to have a vaccination.

You can get three doses of a vaccine from your doctor to prevent hepatitis B.

Your doctor will talk to you about your results and what you need to do.

Hepatitis B test results are **confidential**.

People with hepatitis B **cannot** be forced to leave Australia. Usually people do not need to tell their employer or school. They **cannot** be told to leave their job, or forced to leave school.

Is there treatment for chronic hepatitis B?

Yes. There are treatments that help prevent serious liver damage. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist to see if you need treatment. If you are pregnant and have chronic hepatitis B you should be seen by a health worker in a liver clinic to help reduce transmission to your baby.

Not everyone with chronic hepatitis B needs to see a specialist. However, as the disease can change and cause liver cancer at any time, it is important to see your doctor at least twice a year to have a liver check.

If you have chronic hepatitis B you can help look after your liver by:

- drinking less alcohol or none at all
- eating a balanced diet and without too much fat
- stopping or reducing smoking
- exercising regularly
- managing your stress, getting support and resting as much as you need.

You should also ask your doctor if you should get vaccinated for hepatitis A as this could cause more serious liver disease.

KEY HEPATITIS B MESSAGES:

- › Hepatitis B is very common in many migrant communities, including the Tibetan community.
- › Hepatitis B can lead to liver damage and liver cancer.
- › The most common way hepatitis B is passed on in many countries is from mother-to-child at birth which can be reduced with specialist care.
- › Get tested for hepatitis B.
- › There are treatments for hepatitis B that can prevent liver cancer.
- › If you have chronic hepatitis B see your doctor for regular liver checks of blood test and liver ultrasound.
- › Talk to your doctor if you have questions about your hepatitis B.

Information and Support

Your doctor can answer any questions you have about hepatitis B.

Ask your doctor or the receptionist to organise a free telephone interpreter to help you speak with the doctor.

You can also contact the **NSW Hepatitis Helpline** on **9332 1599** or **1800 803 990** for information. If you need an interpreter to help you contact this service, telephone the **Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS)** on **131 450**. Tell the operator in English that you speak Tibetan and you wish to contact the NSW Hepatitis Helpline. The operator will connect you to a Tibetan speaking interpreter. This is a free service.



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