

Know The Facts About Hepatitis B

(NAPSA)—Doctors are working on ways to overcome the surprising resurgence of a dangerous disease. New cases of hepatitis B have been on the rise in adult men and women in the United States over the past few years. Experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) say low rates of vaccination and an increase in high-risk activities may be to blame.

Although most people who contract hepatitis B as adults get better, up to one in 10 will develop chronic infections that can lead to serious liver damage or liver cancer. Many people with chronic hepatitis B don't have any symptoms, so they don't know they're infected until they become very ill. They may also unknowingly infect others.

Are you at risk for hepatitis B? If so, what should you do?

Who is at risk for hepatitis B?

One in 20 people in the United States will be infected with hepatitis B at some time in their lives. The hepatitis B virus (HBV) is 50 to 100 times more contagious than HIV and can live outside the

body for a week or more.

HBV is found in the blood and other bodily fluids of an infected person. In this country, the virus is most often spread through sexual activity and contaminated needles. People with multiple sexual partners, men who have sex with men, and injection drug users are especially at risk.

Mothers can also pass the infection to their babies during childbirth. This is the most frequent means of infection in parts of the world where hepatitis B is common, such as Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. You may be at higher risk if you were born in one of these areas. In particular, Asian-Pacific Americans have very high rates of HBV infection compared with the rest of the population.

You may also be at risk if:

- You're exposed to blood or other bodily fluids at your job, whether as a doctor, a dentist, a police officer or an emergency worker.
- You've received a tattoo or body piercing with infected equipment.

- You live with or have shared personal items (such as shaving razors) with someone who has hepatitis B.

What to do if you think you are at risk

Since hepatitis B is often "silent," the only way to be sure that you are not infected is to ask your doctor for a test. Early detection offers the best hope for effective treatment. It can also help you avoid giving the disease to someone else.

Treatments for chronic hepatitis B have improved over the last few years. Your doctor can help you pick the best therapy for your needs.

If you are at risk for hepatitis B but have not been infected, you should consider getting vaccinated. Other ways to protect yourself include practicing safe sex and not sharing needles or personal hygiene items with others.

More information

For more information about hepatitis B, go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site, www.cdc.gov.