“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood and produces various molecules essential for the many processes in the body. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected.

Hepatitis B can be a serious liver disease that results from viral infection which cause inflammation of the liver.

Acute Hepatitis B: a short-term infection; occurs within the first 6 months after being infected by the virus.

Chronic Hepatitis B: a lifelong infection

The likelihood that a person develops a chronic infection depends on various internal and external factors. Up to 90% of infants infected with the Hepatitis B virus will develop a chronic infection. In contrast, about 5% of adults will develop chronic Hepatitis B.

Overtime, chronic Hepatitis B can cause many sequelae, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer and even death.
How does it spread?
The virus can be spread through:

- Unprotected sex with an infected person.
- Injection drug use.
- Sharing needles, syringes, and any other equipment to inject drugs with someone infected with Hepatitis B.
- Outbreaks.

Poor infection control has resulted in outbreaks of Hepatitis B in healthcare settings.

- At Birth.

Hepatitis B can be passed from an infected mother during the delivery process.

Hepatitis B is not spread through breastfeeding, sharing eating utensils, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing. Unlike some forms of hepatitis, Hepatitis B is also not spread by contaminated food or water.

Symptoms & Signs
Majority are asymptomatic.

They can present with:

- Fever
- Feeling easily tired
- Loss of appetite
- Upset stomach
- Vomiting/nausea
- Dark-coloured urine
- Grey-coloured stool
- Joint pain
- Yellow skin & eyes

If symptoms occur with an acute infection, they usually appear within 3 months of exposure and can last up to 6 months. If symptoms occur with chronic Hepatitis B, it may be a sign of advanced liver disease.

Prevention

- GET Hepatitis B Vaccination!
- Practice safe sex by using condom (barrier method)
- Avoid sharing needles
- Wear appropriate protection ie gloves etc, when handling blood and bodily fluids
- Avoid sharing toothbrush, razor, or anything else that could have blood on it.
- Ensure that the tools are sterile when you want to get any tattoos or body piercings.

What to do if you suspect an exposure to Hepatitis B infection?

- Seek medical attention immediately
- Blood tests will be done to diagnose Hepatitis B
- You will be given immunoglobulin and vaccination against Hepatitis B if you are not immunized.

Management of disease

Acute Hepatitis B is closely monitored by your doctor. It is usually self-remitting and management involves symptomatic relief. Please ensure regular follow up to prevent long term complications which may include cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Chronic Hepatitis B occurs when the infection lasts longer than 6 months. Chronic Hepatitis B patient is treated with antiviral medications.

Your doctor may discuss the need of liver transplantation in cases of end stage liver disease or cirrhosis.

More on Hepatitis B...

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