



# Hepatitis B

Information for people with  
an intellectual disability, their  
families and carers



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral disease which affects the liver. It can make you seriously ill. It can rarely cause cancer and is sometimes fatal.

There is a vaccine which can protect you against hepatitis B.

People who attend or work in a service for those with an intellectual disability have a higher risk of hepatitis B.

If you attend or work in such a service, you should be vaccinated against hepatitis B. This includes both residential and day services.

## What is a hepatitis B carrier?

Some people who get hepatitis B continue to carry the virus in their blood even though they appear well.

This is called 'chronic hepatitis B' and people who have it are called 'carriers'.

Some carriers go on to develop serious liver disease.

Carriers may not be ill but they can pass the virus on to other people without knowing. People infected in this way can become ill with hepatitis B.

## How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person. You can catch hepatitis B if you:



- Share razors, toothbrushes, washcloths, towels or nail clippers that might have blood or other body fluids on them.
- Come in contact with bleeding sores or cuts of an infected person or get a bite from an infected person which breaks your skin.
- Are a health care worker exposed to infected blood at work.
- Share needles or other equipment when injecting drugs.
- Use un-sterilised needles for body piercing, tattooing, acupuncture, electrolysis, close shaves or you have been injected with a used needle.
- Live with someone who is a hepatitis B carrier.
- Are the child of a hepatitis B carrier.
- Have sex with a person carrying hepatitis B.

## How can I protect myself against hepatitis B?

- Make sure you get the hepatitis B vaccine. This can be given by your family doctor or service provider.
- Wash your hands well after touching blood or body fluids.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, needles for ear piercing, nail files, nail clippers, nail scissors, washcloths or towels.



## The vaccine

- Hepatitis B vaccine is a safe, effective vaccine and the best way to protect yourself.
- The vaccine is usually given in a course of three injections - at your first clinic visit, one month later and six months after the first injection.
- After three injections, a blood test is usually taken to check if you are now protected.
- Some people will need an extra dose(s) of the vaccine. A very small number of people will not respond to the vaccine and are not protected.
- Side effects of the vaccine may be a sore arm and redness where you have been injected.
- If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, talk to your doctor before getting the vaccine.
- You cannot get hepatitis B from the vaccine.

# GET VACCINATED!



# Summary

- Hepatitis B is a serious disease but it can be prevented.
- It is spread by coming in contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person.
- Vaccination and good hygiene can protect you from hepatitis B.

## How can I learn more?

Useful information on hepatitis B can be found from the following sources:

- Your family doctor
- Local public health department of the HSE
- [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)

You can get other leaflets about hepatitis B on the following websites

- [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)
- [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases)
- [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)