***What is Hepatitis B?***

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. When first infected, a person can develop an “acute” infection, which can range in severity from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. Acute Hepatitis B refers to the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis B virus. Some people are able to fight the infection and clear the virus. For others, the infection remains and leads to a “chronic,” or lifelong, illness. Chronic Hepatitis B refers to the illness that occurs when the Hepatitis B virus remains in a person’s body. Over time, the infection can cause serious health problems.

***Is Hepatitis B common?***

Yes. In the United States, approximately 1.2 million people have chronic Hepatitis B. Unfortunately, many people do not know they are infected.

***How is Hepatitis B spread?***

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from a person infected with the Hepatitis B virus enter the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through sexual contact with an infected person or sharing needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment. Hepatitis B can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby at birth. 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.

***What are the symptoms of acute Hepatitis B?***

Not everyone has symptoms with acute Hepatitis B, especially young children. Most adults have symptoms that appear within 3 months of exposure. Symptoms can last from a few weeks to several months and include: fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, grey-colored stools, dark urine, joint pain, and jaundice.

***Risk Groups***

The following groups are especially at risk: anyone having sex with an infected partner, people with multiple sex partners, anyone with a sexually transmitted disease, men who have sexual encounters with other men, people who inject drugs, people who live with someone with Hepatitis B, people with chronic liver disease, end stage renal disease, or HIV infection, healthcare and public safety workers exposed to blood, travelers to certain countries, all infants at birth

***Can Hepatitis B be prevented?***

Yes. The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. For adults, the Hepatitis B vaccine is given as a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. The entire series is needed for long-term protection.

Adapted from CDC-Hepatitis B General Information 2010