

Oakwood University

Health and Counseling Services

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HEPATITIS B FACT SHEET

Hepatitis B is a serious and contagious infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). It can lead to a lifelong infection, cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver failure, and death. There is no cure but it can be prevented by vaccination.

How common is hepatitis B?

One in 20 people now have or will someday contract hepatitis B. Each year about 240,000 Americans are infected, 5,000 die, and 1.25 million have chronic hepatitis B infections and are potentially infectious to others. Fifty percent of those infected do not have symptoms but can go on to infect others. About one third do not know the source of their infection. The HBV has shown to remain infectious on environmental surfaces for at least a month at room temperature.

How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread when blood or body fluids of an infected person are absorbed into an individual's blood stream through broken skin or a mucous membrane. The virus can live in all body fluids including blood, saliva, semen, and vaginal fluids. It can enter the body through cuts, tears, or abrasions in the skin and through mucous membranes of the mouth, vagina, anus, and eyes.

Why are college students at risk?

- Seventy-five percent of all hepatitis B cases occur between ages 15-39
- Students from highly endemic areas may be carriers
- Health sciences students may come in contact with infected materials during their course of study
- College students may come in contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person during:
 - Contact sports (players may be exposed to each other's blood or saliva)
 - Helping an injured person who is bleeding
 - Sharing items like a razor, toothbrush or earrings
 - Use of illicit injectable drugs
 - Getting a tattoo or body piercing with a contaminated instrument or needle
 - Sexual contact (causes 30-60% of new hepatitis B infections in the U.S.)
 - Living in close quarters—like a residence hall—may increase the risk of exposure to carriers of the virus
 - Travel abroad to high risk areas

Hepatitis B Vaccine

The hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective. *You cannot get the disease from the vaccine.* The most common side effect is soreness at the site of the injection. Vaccination requires a series of three shots over a six-month period. After that a booster shot is not necessary. The vaccine protects 96 percent of those who complete the three-dose vaccination series.

For More Information

- The Health & Counseling Services phone number is 256-726-7840.
- Center for Disease Control (CDC), www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_hepatitis.htm
- American College Health Association (ACHA), www.acha.org
- Immunization Action Coalition (IAC), www.immunize.org