

VIRAL HEPATITIS



WHAT IS VIRAL HEPATITIS?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. Heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions can cause hepatitis. However, hepatitis is often caused by a virus. Hepatitis B virus (HBV), Human Immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and Tuberculosis (TB) are common infections in South Africa.

The five main viral classifications of hepatitis are hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E. A different virus is responsible for each type of viral hepatitis.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 354 million currently live with chronic hepatitis B and C globally.

Number of S.A. cases

Southern Africa is considered to have high endemicity for hepatitis A with seroprevalence among children aged 1-4 years and 5-9 years estimated to be 83% and 92% respectively. Furthermore, it is thought that the region has remained highly endemic for HAV for the years 1990 to 2005.

South Africa has one of the largest HBV burdens globally with an estimated hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) prevalence of 6.7 per cent (3.4 million individuals). About 50,300 new infections in 2018.

An estimated 600 000 South Africans are chronically infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV). To date, accurate prevalence data are lacking, but emerging data suggest a significant burden in key populations.



HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis A is the result of an infection with the hepatitis A virus (HAV). This type of hepatitis is an acute, short-term disease.

HEPATITIS B

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) causes hepatitis B. This is often an ongoing, chronic condition. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that around 826,000 Trusted Source people are living with chronic hepatitis B in the United States and around 257 million people worldwide.

HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C comes from the hepatitis C virus (HCV). HCV is among the most common bloodborne viral infections in the United States and typically presents as a long-term condition.

HEPATITIS D

This is a rare form of hepatitis that only occurs in conjunction with hepatitis B infection. The hepatitis D virus (HDV) causes liver inflammation like other strains, but a person cannot contract HDV without an existing hepatitis B infection.

Globally, HDV affects almost 5 percent of people with chronic hepatitis B.

HEPATITIS E

Hepatitis E is a waterborne disease that results from exposure to the hepatitis E virus (HEV). Hepatitis E is mainly found in areas with poor sanitation and typically results from ingesting faecal matter that contaminates the water supply.

CAUSES OF HEPATITIS

COMMON ROUTE OF TRANSMISSION?

A Exposure to HAV in food or water.

B Contact with HBV in body fluids, such as blood, vaginal secretions, or semen.

C Contact with HCV in body fluids, such as blood, vaginal secretions, or semen.

D Contact with blood containing HDV.

E Exposure to HEV in food or water.



COMMON SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS

If you are living with a chronic form of hepatitis, like hepatitis B and C, you may not show symptoms until the damage affects liver function. By contrast, people with acute hepatitis may present with symptoms shortly after contracting a hepatitis virus.

COMMON SYMPTOMS HEPATITIS INCLUDE:

- fatigue
- flu-like symptoms
- dark urine
- pale stool
- abdominal pain
- loss of appetite
- unexplained weight loss
- yellow skin and eyes, which may be signs of jaundice

HOW HEPATITIS IS TREATED

Treatment options will vary by the type of hepatitis you have and whether the infection is acute or chronic.

HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis A is a short-term illness and may not require treatment. However, if symptoms cause a great deal of discomfort, bed rest may be necessary. In addition, if you experience vomiting or diarrhea, your doctor may recommend a dietary program to maintain your hydration and nutrition.

HEPATITIS B

There is no specific treatment program for acute hepatitis B. However, if you have chronic hepatitis B, you will require antiviral medications. This form of treatment can be costly, as you may have to continue it for several months or years.

Treatment for chronic hepatitis B also requires regular medical evaluations and monitoring to determine if the virus is responding to treatment.

HEPATITIS C

Antiviral medications can treat both acute and chronic forms of hepatitis C.

Typically, people who develop chronic hepatitis C will use a combination of antiviral drug therapies. They may also need further testing to determine the best form of treatment. People who develop cirrhosis or liver disease due to chronic hepatitis C may be candidates for a liver transplant.

HEPATITIS D

The WHO lists pegylated interferon alpha as a treatment for hepatitis D. However, this medication can have severe side effects. As a result, it's not recommended for people with cirrhosis liver damage, those with psychiatric conditions, and people with autoimmune diseases.

HEPATITIS E

Currently, no specific medical therapies are available to treat hepatitis E. Because the infection is often acute, it typically resolves on its own.

Doctors will typically advise people with this infection to get adequate rest, drink plenty of fluids, get enough nutrients, and avoid alcohol. However, pregnant women who develop this infection require close monitoring and care.

TIPS TO PREVENT HEPATITIS

There are vaccines that can help protect against many hepatitis viruses. Minimizing your risk of exposure to substances containing these viruses can also be an important preventive measure.

VACCINES

A vaccine for hepatitis A is available and can help prevent the contraction of HAV. The hepatitis A vaccine is a series of two doses and most children begin vaccination at age. This is also available for adults and can also include the hepatitis B vaccine.

The CDC recommends hepatitis B vaccinations for all new-borns. Doctors typically administer the series of three vaccines over the first 6 months of childhood.

The CDC also recommends the vaccine for all healthcare and medical personnel. Vaccination against hepatitis B can also prevent hepatitis D.

There are currently no vaccines for hepatitis C or E.



REDUCING EXPOSURE

Hepatitis viruses can transmit from person to person through contact with bodily fluids, water, and foods containing infectious agents. Minimizing your risk of contact with these substances can help to prevent contracting hepatitis viruses.

Practicing effective hygiene is one way to avoid contracting hepatitis A and E. The viruses that cause these conditions can be present in water. If you're traveling to a country where there is a high prevalence of hepatitis, you should avoid:

- local water
- ice
- raw or undercooked shellfish and oysters
- raw fruit and vegetables

The hepatitis B, C, and D viruses can transmit through contact with bodily fluids containing these infectious agents.

You can reduce your risk of coming into contact with fluids containing these viruses by:

- not sharing needles
- not sharing razors
- not using someone else's toothbrush
- not touching spilled blood

Hepatitis B and C can carry through sexual intercourse and sexual contact. Using barrier methods, such as condoms and dental dams, during sexual activity can help decrease the risk of infection.

COMPLICATIONS OF HEPATITIS

Chronic hepatitis B or C can lead to more severe health problems. Because the virus affects the liver, people with chronic hepatitis B or C are at risk of:

- chronic liver disease
- cirrhosis
- liver cancer

WHEN YOUR LIVER STOPS FUNCTIONING NORMALLY, LIVER FAILURE CAN OCCUR. COMPLICATIONS OF LIVER FAILURE INCLUDE:

- bleeding disorders
- a build-up of fluid in your abdomen, known as ascites
- increased blood pressure in portal veins that enter your liver, known as portal hypertension
- kidney failure
- hepatic encephalopathy, which can involve fatigue, memory loss, and diminished mental abilities
- hepatocellular carcinoma, which is a form of liver cancer
- death

People with chronic hepatitis B and C should avoid alcohol as it can accelerate liver disease and failure. Certain supplements and medications can also affect liver function. If you have chronic hepatitis B or C, check with your doctor before taking any new medications.

Reference:

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

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