

28 JULY 2023 WORLD HEPATITIS DAY

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. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

Many people with hepatitis do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. If symptoms occur with an acute infection, they can appear anytime from 2 weeks to 6 months after exposure. Symptoms of acute hepatitis can include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, light-colored stools, joint pain, and jaundice. Symptoms of chronic viral hepatitis can take decades to develop.

What causes it?

Hepatitis A Hepatitis B Hepatitis C

- 19,900 estimated infections in 2020
- 14,000 estimated new infections in 2020
- Estimated 880,000 adults with chronic hepatitis B
- In South Africa (SA), over 1.9 million people are chronically infected with HBV, and 70% of all Black chronic carriers are infected with HBV sub genotype A1.
- 66,700 estimated new infections in 2020
- Estimated 2.2 million adults with hepatitis C

How is it spread?

Hepatitis A

The virus is spread when someone ingests the virus (even in microscopic amounts too small to see) through close, personal contact with an infected person, or through eating contaminated food or drink.

Hepatitis B

This is primarily spread when blood, semen, or certain other body fluids – even in microscopic amounts – from a person infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. The hepatitis B virus can also be transmitted by:

- Birth to an infected pregnant person
- Sex with an infected person
- Sharing equipment that has been contaminated with blood from an infected person, such as needles, syringes.
- Sharing personal items such as toothbrushes or razors, but is less common
- Direct contact with the blood or open sores of a person who has hepatitis B
- Although the virus can be found in saliva, it is not spread through kissing or sharing utensils. Hepatitis B is not spread through sneezing, coughing, hugging, breastfeeding or through food or water.



Hepatitis C

Virus is spread when blood from a person infected with the hepatitis C virus – even in microscopic amounts – enters the body of someone who is not infected. The hepatitis C virus can also be transmitted by:

- Sharing equipment that has been contaminated with blood from an infected person, such as needles and syringes
- Unregulated tattoos or body piercings with contaminated instruments
- Receiving a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992 (when widespread screening eliminated hepatitis C from the blood supply)
- Birth to an infected pregnant person
- Sexual contact with an infected person
- Hepatitis C is not spread by sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, sneezing or through food or water.

Last Reviewed: March 9, 2023

Source: Division of Viral Hepatitis, National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention.

CDC – Centre for Disease Control Web page.

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/abc/index.htm#:~:text=Hepatitis%20means%20inflammation%20of%20the,medical%20conditions%20can%20cause%20hepatitis.>

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