

Hepatitis B

In 10 QUESTIONS

*Koli is a word used in the LGBTI+ lingo in Turkey to refer to sexual intercourse.

HEVI LGBTI+ Association
Kolime Health Series 5

Hepatit B In 10 Questions

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KOLIME HEALTH SERIES 5

Hepatitis B

10

In QUESTIONS

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What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is a term that means inflammation of the liver. There are many causes of hepatitis. Although heavy alcohol use, some medicines, toxins, and some medical conditions can cause hepatitis, viruses are the most common cause of hepatitis.

There are five viruses called hepatitis viruses: Hepatitis A, B, C, D, E. Of these, Hepatitis A (HAV), Hepatitis B (HBV) and Hepatitis C (HCV) are accountable for most hepatitis. These three viruses can cause similar symptoms, but their modes of transmission and effects on the liver are different. Vaccines are available against HAV and HBV, but there is no effective vaccine against HCV.

01

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B infection is an infection of the liver caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV).

When a person is first infected with the Hepatitis B virus, they may have a very mild infection with no or very few symptoms. Some people may develop a chronic or lifelong infection.

Millions of people around the world live with chronic Hepatitis without knowing they are infected with Hepatitis B. Hepatitis B is the number one cause of liver cancer. It is also the most common cause of liver transplantation.

How is Hepatitis B transmitted?

Hepatitis B virus is spread when bodily fluids such as semen or blood from an infected person enter the body of an uninfected person. Hepatitis B virus is transmitted 50-100 times faster than HIV. It is easily transmitted during sexual interaction. Hepatitis B can also be transmitted through sharing needles, syringes or other equipment used to inject drugs.

The Hepatitis B virus can be transmitted through the following ways:

From an infected pregnant person to their baby

Sexual contact with people living with HBV and not accessing or not being able to access treatment

Sharing medical equipment such as needles, syringes and even glucose monitors that have come into contact with the blood of a person living with Hepatitis B

Direct contact with the blood or open wounds of a person living with Hepatitis B

Inadequate infection control in health facilities can result in transmission to others.

Some transmission is possible through sharing personal items such as toothbrushes or shavers.

Sexual Transmission and Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B can be transmitted through sexual contact. Unvaccinated adults with multiple sex partners and sex partners with chronic Hepatitis B infection are at higher risk of infection.

Between 10% and 40% of adults with sexually transmitted infections have evidence of past or current Hepatitis B infection. Most of these infections could have been prevented through universal vaccination during the provision of sexually transmitted infection prevention or treatment services. Since behavioural risk factors for sexually transmitted infections and Hepatitis B are similar, offering Hepatitis B vaccination to all adults as part of routine prevention services in sexually transmitted infection treatment facilities reduces Hepatitis B infection in adults.

03

How is Hepatitis B not transmitted?

Although Hepatitis B virus can be found in saliva, it is not transmitted by kissing. It is not transmitted through daily contacts such as handshaking, hugging, sharing the same plate, dish and food; through food or water, sneezing, coughing, breastfeeding.

04

Who is at risk?

People who have not been vaccinated against Hepatitis B, people who have been vaccinated against Hepatitis B but whose antibody level is not at the expected level are vulnerable to HBV. HBV can be transmitted through blood or sexually to anyone who is unprotected.

Sharing needles or other equipment used for injecting drugs puts people at risk for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV. Among people infected with HIV who have not been diagnosed or started treatment, 10% also have Hepatitis B and 25% have Hepatitis C.

Since LGBTI+ persons and sex workers have limited access to condoms, it is important to be vaccinated to protect them from HBV.

05

Is it possible to prevent the transmission of Hepatitis B?

Managing the contact and vaccination are important to prevent the transmission of Hepatitis B. A preventive vaccine against Hepatitis B is available. Vaccination against HBV has been an effective method to reduce infection but mainly to prevent liver cancer. HBV vaccine is known as the first vaccine against cancer.

Hepatitis B vaccine was included in the childhood vaccination schedule in Turkey in 1998. Hepatitis B vaccine is applied in three doses at birth, at the end of the first month and at the end of the sixth month.

The Viral Hepatitis Prevention and Control Program in Turkey aims to prevent chronic Hepatitis B infection and reduce the spread of Hepatitis B-related chronic liver disease, cirrhosis and hepatocellular cancer. In Turkey, there has been a 76% decrease in the number of cases diagnosed with Hepatitis B between 2015-2019 compared to years between 2005-2009.

If you were born before 1998 and did not get Hepatitis B vaccine or if you were born after 1998 and have a question mark about your vaccinations, you can consult a physician and get tested and if you are not immune, you can get vaccinated with the guidance of the physician.

06

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B infection can be short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic).

Acute Hepatitis B is a condition that occurs within the first 6 months after a person has been exposed to the Hepatitis B virus. Some people infected with acute Hepatitis B have no or mild symptoms. Acute Hepatitis

B infection may occur with a flu-like pattern of fatigue, weakness, muscle pain, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and mild fever. Depending on the increase in bilirubin in the blood, light-colored stools and jaundice (yellowness) can be seen on the skin and in the white area of the eyes called sclera.

During acute infection, HBV surface antigen (HBsAg) and HBVe antigen (HBVeAg) become detectable within four weeks after infection. Immunity and clearing of the infection occurs following the development of antibodies against HBsAg and HBeAg (anti-HBs Ab and anti-HBe Ab). Detection of anti-HBs antibodies indicates immunity.

Lack of antibodies to HBsAg indicates chronic HBV infection. Most people infected with Hepatitis B remain asymptomatic until the onset of cirrhosis or end-stage liver disease.

How do I know if I have Hepatitis B?

Most people infected with Hepatitis B have no symptoms, so the only way to know if you have Hepatitis is to get tested. 2 out of 3 people living with Hepatitis B do not know they have the infection. Doctors diagnose Hepatitis using one or more blood tests, depending on the type of Hepatitis.

Who should be tested?

All adults aged 18 and over, at least once in their lives
All pregnant people, in early stages of each pregnancy
Babies born to pregnant people living with HBV
Anyone requesting a Hepatitis B test
Anyone with a high risk of exposure to Hepatitis B should be tested periodically
If disposable syringes are used by more than one other person, they should be tested periodically

People infected with HIV but unable to access treatment

Living with Hepatitis C
People with multiple sex partners
People on kidney dialysis
People with elevated liver enzymes without knowing the cause
People who donate blood, plasma, organs, tissue or semen

08

Is there a relationship between Hepatitis B and other infections?

Hepatitis B transmission modes also pose a risk of Hepatitis C and HIV transmission. Sharing syringes or other materials used to inject drugs or substances puts a person at risk for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV. STIs are predominantly transmitted through sexual intercourse, although some can be transmitted through blood and blood products. It is important to do other tests when a person has one STI because often a person may have more than one STI. You can ask your doctor to do a general screening when you are tested for Hepatitis.

09

Is there a cure for Hepatitis B?

People who test positive for acute Hepatitis B are usually treated with supportive care (rest, adequate nutrition and hydration) to help relieve symptoms. There are no specific medicines.

People living with chronic Hepatitis B can be treated with antiviral drugs and should be monitored regularly for signs of progression of liver disease.

Several treatments are available for people living with chronic Hepatitis B that can significantly improve health and delay or reverse the effects on the liver.

10

What can I do if I have “crazy questions” about Hepatitis B?

You can consult your family doctor and/or an infectious diseases and clinical microbiology specialist. If you are hesitant about anything related to appealing a physician, you can consult LGBTI+ associations to reach LGBTI+ friendly physicians.

Sources:

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