



HEPATITIS B

WHAT IS IT

It is an infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). This virus infects primarily liver cells, causing inflammation (hepatitis).

Nine out of ten people under the age of 5 infected with HBV develop chronic hepatitis B. One in ten people over the age of 5 infected with HBV develop chronic hepatitis B.

One in four people with chronic hepatitis B progresses to other liver disorders: fibrous nodules (cirrhosis) or cancer.

HOW IT MANIFESTS

Six out of ten infected people have no symptoms. The average time between transmission of the infection and the appearance of the first symptoms is 90 days. The symptoms are not specific and may include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, grayish or white stools, joint pain, dark urine, and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice).

HOW IT IS TRANSMITTED

HBV is mainly transmitted through contact with blood, however it can also be transmitted through contact with other biological liquids like semen and vaginal secretions, and in rare occasions through saliva.

HBV survives outside the body for up to 1 week while maintaining its ability to transmit infection.

HBV can be transmitted through:

- mother-to-child transmission during childbirth;
- sharing drug injection equipment;
- injury with sharp/piercing equipment used by infected people;
- sexual practices without the use of condoms;
- sharing equipment that may contain blood and/or saliva, such as razors and toothbrushes.

In Portugal, blood and/or organ donations do not transmit HBV, because all donors are screened. HBV is also not transmitted during hemodialysis and surgery, since in Portugal the equipment used is sterilized and for single use.

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED

The rapid test for HBV looks for antigens (part of the virus) in a small blood sample. All infected people have antigens after 8 weeks, before that they may not have enough to be detected in the rapid test. A non-reactive result indicates that there has been no infection for more than 8 weeks. A reactive result from the rapid test indicates that there is an infection but does not allow us to determine whether it is in the acute or chronic phase. The test that confirms the infection is done by searching for the virus in the blood.

HOW IT IS TREATED

Nine out of ten infected adults resolve the infection without treatment. People with chronic hepatitis B may require treatment with antiviral drugs. The drugs prevent the virus from using liver cells to multiply, preventing liver cancer. Treatment and healthcare for people with chronic hepatitis B are free of charge through the National Health Service (SNS).

HOW TO PREVENT IT

Vaccine: through three doses of the HBV vaccine. The HBV vaccine is free for all adults at risk and who have not been vaccinated. Access to the vaccine is available at National Health Service vaccination centers upon presentation of a medical prescription for the vaccine with the following justification: "Under rule 15/DT of 10/15/2001, in force, as stated on page 54 of the 2017 National Vaccination Program."

Do not share consumables: people who inject drugs should use sterile, single-use materials to prevent the contamination with the virus.

Do not share personal hygiene items that may contain blood: razor blades and toothbrushes may contain blood and should be for individual use only.

Regular testing: regular screening of unvaccinated people can result in early detection and treatment, preventing transmission of the infection.

Reviewed by the GAT Health Coordination. The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace the one provided by healthcare professionals. Decisions related to prevention, diagnosis, and treatment should always be validated by healthcare professionals.

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