

WHAT HAS HEPATITIS B GOT TO DO WITH ME?

Advice / Information / A Guide for Gay Men

"Some time back I started to feel very tired,nausous with a continous headache,generally run down.So I went to my doctor with what I thought were flu symptoms,he became concerned and took some blood samples to test for Hepatitis B,I couldn't believe it when the results came back positive.

Now I have good days and bad days,on good days I can get around okay but never wander very far away from home,on bad days Ihave no energy at all and just stay in bed.

I knew all about the Hep B virus,how infectious it was and that I was in a high group.I also knew about the vaccine and how to get it,but there was always some petty excuse for not doing something about it.In hindsight I was stupid and naive,now I'm concentrating on getting better.Recovery is a slow process.

My advice to others is to get vaccinated now before it's too late."

Incidence of HEP B in Ireland among Gay Men

Hep B is a real threat to your health and lifestyle. It can be a long illness which messes up your work and social life. You may have to give up drink for six months or more and because Hep B is so infectious it will have a terrible effect on your sex life. But it can be prevented all you have to do is to get vaccinated.

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To Bill Kelly The information in this is basically sound

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HEPATITIS B:

- **Is a virus which infects the liver.**
- **Is common among gay/bisexual men.**
- **Is transmitted through sexual contact.**
- **Is ten times more infectious than HIV.**

HEPATITIS B IS A MAJOR HEALTH RISK

Safer sex will not necessarily protect you.

10% remain infectious

Can cause severe illnesses

It can be avoided by vaccination

SYMPTOMS

Early symptoms can be difficult to detect, they range from jaundice (skin and eyes appear yellow, urine becomes discloured)to mild flu like symptoms, or no symptoms at all. Weight loss is common during illness. Infection may require hospitalisation.

In most people the virus clears up within six months and they become immune, but in about 10% of the cases the individual remains infectious and may go on to develop cancer or cirrhosis of the liver.

HOW DO I CATCH HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis B, C and D are present in all body fluids including blood, cum & pre-cum, saliva and even tears. Hepatitis is usually caught through sexual contact including sucking, arse licking and even wet kissing. It is very important to be careful with hygiene. Never share sex toys, or wet razors, or toothbrushes. Hepatitis can't be caught from coughs or sneezes, or from door knobs or toilet sets. It may be best to avoid unwashed knives, forks, cups and glasses.

TREATMENT

Unfortunately, once you have caught hep B there is usually no specific treatment. Doctors may advise you to rest and to avoid alcohol and drugs for possibly six months.
For those people who remain infectious drugs such as interferons can be used to treat patients

HIV AND HEP B

If your immune system is already suppressed due to HIV infection, symptoms can be more severe and recovery longer. You may need extra booster injections to develop an immunity to Hep b.
HIV + people who develop Hep B are at a higher risk of becoming chronic carriers of the virus.

VACCINATION:

- **is safe and effective**
- **has little or no side effects.**
- **is free from STD clinics**
- **is safe for HIV+ people**

The vaccination against Hep B works in almost all cases. The basic dose is 3 injections over a 6 month period. The course of injectons must be completed for the vaccine to be effective.

If you have been vaccinated: did you complete all the injections in the course?
If you have been vaccinated for five years or more you may need another booster, your doctor/clinic will advise you.

SAFER-SEX

Will safer-sex protect me? Not very effectively. Hep B is much more infectious than HIV and is therefore much easier to catch. Sucking without a condom is low risk for HIV can be high risk for Hep B. Even kissing can be risky because the virus is in saliva.
To protect yourself, and others, stick to the lowest risk, wanking, body rubbing or cumming between thighs, making sure you avoid any areas of sore or brolken skin.
Remember the golden rule for safer-sex - on him, not in him.

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