# New Venture Offers Free and Discounted Meds for Chronic Hepatitis B

The Hepatitis B Foundation and Rx Outreach will supply two frontline medications: tenofovir and entecavir. Here's how to enroll.

December 9, 2021 By Trent Straube

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People living with chronic hepatitis B may be eligible for free and discounted medications thanks to a new partnership between the Hepatitis B Foundation and the nonprofit pharmacy Rx Outreach.

Two frontline medications for chronic hep B are available at a discount through the program; what's more, a number of eligible clients will receive a year's supply for free. The two meds are generic Viread (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate) and generic Baraclude (entecavir), according to an announcement by the Hepatitis B Foundation, a nonprofit focused on patient advocacy, research and education around the chronic liver disease.

To receive either of the medications, participants must meet income requirements, have a prescription for the treatment and enroll in the program here: rxoutreach.org/hepb. Medications will be mailed to participants' homes.

Last year, according to the foundation announcement, 988 people living with hepatitis B received discounted meds through the program with Rx Outreach. (The pharmacy offers over 1,000 free and discounted medications to clients who lack insurance or are underinsured.)

As explained in the Hep Basics pages, hepatitis B virus (HBV) is a highly contagious viral infection that can cause serious liver damage. Currently, there is no cure for hepatitis B. However multiple medications are used to manage hepatitis B to prevent the disease from progressing to more serious stages.

The initial infection is known as acute hepatitis B, meaning short-term inflammation of the liver (in fact, hepatitis simply means inflammation of the liver). Most people are able to clear hep B from the body within six months of becoming infected. If they clear it, they are no longer infected, nor can they infect others. In contrast, a chronic hepatitis B infection means that the immune system is not able to get rid of the virus within six months after infection. In other words, the virus

continues to reproduce in the person's liver for months or years after infection. This can increase the risk of liver damage and liver cancer. What's more, someone with chronic HBV infection can transmit the virus to others. The risk of chronic infection is higher in infants and children than it is in adults.

The good news is that there's an effective vaccine that protects against hepatitis B. Because of routine vaccinations against hep B, cases have plummeted from about 260,000 a year in the 1980s to about 21,000 in 2016.

According to the Hepatitis B Transmission and Risks section, the virus is highly contagious and may be present in blood and body fluids, including semen and vaginal secretions. The saliva of people with hep B may contain evidence of the virus but in such small concentrations that kissing does not spread HBV. Here are the most common ways hepatitis B is transmitted:

- Sex with an infected partner
- Acquired at birth from an infected mother
- Sharing injection drug equipment (including needles, syringes, cookers, drug-preparation equipment)
- Contact with blood or open sores of an infected person
- Needle stick or other skin puncture
- Sharing items such as glucose monitors, razors or toothbrushes with an infected person.

Hepatitis B may also be spread through non-injection drug paraphernalia (e.g., cocaine straws and crack pipes) as a result of exposure to blood. An unsterilized instrument may transmit HBV during acupuncture, tattooing and body piercing. A human bite may spread hepatitis B.

Hep B is not spread through food or water, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, hand holding, coughing or sneezing.

HBV may live outside the body for at least seven days and still be potentially infectious.

In related news, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all adults under 60 should get hepatitis B shots. Plus, a new law in California requires health care facilities to offer

adult clients free screenings for hepatitis B and hepatitis C. The law also requires that care and treatment be provided for those who test positive.

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