



Other Issues Related to Hepatitis B

Stigma and Hepatitis B

Unfortunately, hepatitis B is stigmatized, largely due to ignorance about the disease. One reason for the stigma is that hep B is potentially infectious. Although hep B may be passed sexually or via blood-to-blood contact, people are not at risk during casual contact. Hep B isn't passed by hugging, kissing or drinking from the same glass. Nevertheless, people may be fearful that they can "catch" hep B from someone who is infected. In some communities, people with hep B don't disclose their status because they are afraid of being shunned. Fear and ignorance have cost people their jobs, friendships and relationships.

Another cause of stigma relates to hep B's association with injection drug use. People and societies often lack compassion and understanding about injection drug use. Former injection drug users may feel haunted by their past and want to avoid this label. Active injection drug users carry the burden of having two stigmatized diseases: addiction and hepatitis B.

Stigma may also affect those who have never used injection drugs. Misinformed people sometimes assume that all people with hep B have used injection drugs, despite the many ways hepatitis B may be acquired. Those without a history of drug use do not want to be labeled as injection drug users.

Cultural practices may affect how openly hepatitis B is talked about. In the United States, hepatitis B disproportionately affects Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). While AAPIs make up less than 5 percent of the U.S. population, they account for more than 50 percent of Americans living with hepatitis B. Two-thirds of Asians do not know they have hepatitis B. Shame, stigma and fear may prevent people from talking about hep B openly.

For some, the stigma hurts more than hep B itself. However, although it may be hard to avoid stigma, there are ways to cope with it. Here are some suggestions:

- [Educate yourself](#) and others. Inaccurate information can perpetuate stereotypes.
- [Get support](#). It helps to spend time with others who share similar experiences.
- Join a [patient advocacy group](#) or local viral hepatitis task force. Help bring about change.
- Challenge stereotypes. If you do not like how media and marketers portray people with hepatitis B, let them know.

- [Take action](#). Make use of social media and other tools to change the political and social climates. Call or send letters, emails, tweets and faxes to legislators, policy makers and other agencies. May is [Hepatitis Awareness Month](#) and an especially good time to become involved.
- Confront stigma—even if you think that one person can't make a difference. As anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

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