What are the Different Types of Hepatitis?

May 20, 2020 By Connie M. Welch

Viral hepatitis is a liver infection that causes inflammation and damage. There are 5 viruses that cause viral hepatitis, Hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E. Hepatitis A and E viruses can cause acute infections (infections that last less than 6 months). Hepatitis B, C, and D viruses can cause acute and chronic (lasting longer than 6 months and typically ongoing) liver infections.

It's important to understand each types of viral hepatitis in order to be proactive against transmission and if you become infected, it's possible to be co-infected with more than one type of hepatitis at the same time. Know the risk factors, get tested, and receive vaccines for Hepatitis A and B. There are no vaccines for Hepatitis C, D, or E.

Hepatitis A (HAV)

Hepatitis A is an acute infection. The patient typically recovers without treatment. Hepatitis A is caused by eating contaminated food, or drinking water, through an infected person's stool, or by anal-oral contact during sex. Be proactive by getting the vaccine for Hep A and practice good hygiene and handwashing to reduce your risk.

Hepatitis B (HBV)

Hepatitis B can cause acute or lead to chronic infection. Hep B is spread by contact with an infected person's blood, semen, or other body fluid.

Risk factors:

- Getting pricked with an needle that is has blood infected with Hep B (this is a risk especially for health care workers)
- Having received blood prior to 1992 through a transfusion
- Getting a tattoo or body piercing with unsterile needles or tools that were used on someone else
- Sharing drug needles, razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items

- Having unprotected sex (not using a condom) with an infected person
- Through birth a woman can give Hep B to her baby at birth or through breast milk

With the Hepatitis B virus, the infection can cause serious liver damage and possible cancer. Blood banks now screen all blood and blood products for hepatitis viruses. In some acute cases patients are able to clear the virus but chronic conditions can occur. While there is treatment for Hep B to help suppress the virus, there is no cure. It is highly recommended to get the vaccine for Hep B.

Hepatitis C (HCV)

Hepatitis C can cause acute or chronic infection which can lead to liver damage from mild to severe scarring (cirrhosis) and high risk for liver cancer. Hepatitis C is the leading cause for liver transplants in the U.S. Hep C is transmitted in the same way as Hep B. Blood banks now screen for Hepatitis C, greatly reducing the spread of the virus through blood products. There is no vaccine for Hep C but there are a variety of treatment options with a high cure rate. Hep C is often known as the “silent killer” due to symptoms don’t usually show up until severe liver damage has been done. Be proactive and be tested and seek early treatment.

Risk Factors:

- Anyone born between 1945 and 1965
- If you have ever had a blood transfusion or organ transplant prior to July 1992
- Received a clotting factor made before 1987
- Have ever had hemodialysis
- HCV contaminated needle stick or blood in a hospital or healthcare environment
- Shared needles or other equipment to inject drugs or inhaled drugs (even once)
- Have ever worked or been housed in prison
- Have HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)
- Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person with HCV enters the body of someone who is not infected
- Anyone with unexplained liver problems or inflammation, including abnormal liver tests
- Borrowed razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers with someone who has Hep C
- Born to an HCV infected mother
- Tattoos or body piercing with reused unsterile tools

- Multiple sex partners or sex with partners who have other sexually transmitted disease, or rough sex
- Some people may never know where they contracted HCV.

Hepatitis D (HDV)

Hepatitis D is a virus that can exist while being infected with Hepatitis B at the same time, meaning this is a co-infection. A superinfection can occur if you already have chronic Hep B and then become infected with Hep D. Hepatitis D is transmitted in the same way as Hep B and Hep C. See risk factors above. While there is no vaccine for Hep D directly, be proactive and receive the vaccine for Hep B to reduce your chances of infection with Hep D.

Hepatitis E (HEV)

Hepatitis E is a virus much like Hep A in that it is typically transmitted by drinking contaminated water, or by an infected person's stool, oral-anal contact. It can also be transmitted by eating undercooked pork or wild game. Hep E can cause swelling of the liver, but generally no long term damage. Hepatitis E does not typically occur in the U.S. While there is no vaccine for Hep E is recommended to practice good hygiene and avoid drinking tap water when traveling internationally.

Don't assume your doctor or hospital test you for any type of Hepatitis virus. It is typically not part of a general blood workup. You need to talk to your doctor and ask to be tested. If you have been diagnosed with any type of Hepatitis virus, see a liver specialist like a Hepatologist or Gastroenterologist who specialize in liver disease. Be proactive and be tested and receive the necessary vaccines available. Know your risk factors and the facts and myths on how hepatitis is transmitted.

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