

## Patient information factsheet

# Hepatitis B

### The facts

- Hepatitis B is a virus that affects the liver, causing inflammation, but often no symptoms are felt.
- It is more common in Africa and Asia but is also found worldwide.
- Hepatitis B can go on to cause permanent damage to the liver (known as cirrhosis) and liver cancers if it is not first identified and then managed by a doctor or nurse.
- Hepatitis B is easily manageable and you can live a 'normal' life. The important thing is to know you have it so that we can look after you in the right way.

### How to prevent spreading the virus

- It is mainly spread by direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person. This can be blood-to-blood contact, sexual contact or mother-to-child transmission (during the birth and, on very rare occasions, via breast milk).
- There is a vaccination available which protects against hepatitis B, but it only works if you don't already have the condition.
- The vaccination can be given to newborn babies to protect them from mother-to-child transmission. If the child is vaccinated, the mother can safely breastfeed.
- If you have hepatitis B it is important that family members, sexual partners and household contacts are tested and vaccinated to prevent them from catching it.
- If you have hepatitis B it is important you take precautions such as using condoms with sexual partners and not sharing razors, needles or nail clippers with anyone else.
- Hepatitis B is found in saliva but it is not transmitted to others by sharing household items such as cups, knives and forks. It's therefore safe to share these items.

### Treatment

- Many people with hepatitis B don't actually need treatment; they just require monitoring. This is done by a blood test and, for some people a scan, usually every 6 months.
- Some people will clear the virus spontaneously themselves (this usually happens within 6 months of infection if it is going to happen). However hepatitis B is often a long-term (chronic) condition that requires life-long management.
- **It is essential that you are under the care of the liver (hepatology) team (the local team is based at Southampton General Hospital) if you know you have hepatitis B.**
- We will monitor you at least every 6 months and if we think you need treatment, we can arrange for that to be started.
- Treatment is typically a tablet once a day which has few, if any, side-effects.
- Current research suggests there are no effective alternative (herbal) medications that will cure or suppress hepatitis B.

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## What to do

- If you have ever been told you have hepatitis B, you should see your GP and ask them to re-test you.
- If you have ever had contact (household, sexual, blood-to-blood) with someone with hepatitis B (or you think this is a possibility) you should ask your GP for a test.
- If you are confirmed as having hepatitis B, your GP will refer you to the hepatology team at Southampton General Hospital.
- Once you receive an appointment with the hepatology team, we will do some additional tests and decide if you need treatment or just require monitoring.
- You can call the hepatology nurses on **023 8120 4617** for more information or email us on: **hepatologynurses@uhs.nhs.uk**.
- More information (in various languages) is available at: **www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/publications/translations**

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