



Hepatitis B and Cancer Medications

What you need to know

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver infection caused by a virus. Your liver is an organ that helps your body process nutrients, filter your blood and fight infections.

Hepatitis B may cause:

- No signs or symptoms. Many people who get the hepatitis B never feel sick and get better. They may not even know they have the infection.
- Illness for a few weeks (acute infection). An acute infection can make you feel tired and less hungry. Your skin and/or eyes may also turn yellow (jaundice).
- A serious life-long illness (chronic hepatitis B). Untreated chronic hepatitis B can lead to liver scarring (cirrhosis), liver cancer, and death. Chronic hepatitis B is known as a 'silent' disease because you can have it for many years before it causes any problems in your body.

How does Hepatitis B spread from person to person?

Hepatitis B spreads through **contact with blood and other body fluids** of an infected person.

Since people can have the infection and not know it, they can also spread it to others without knowing it.

Most people who get hepatitis B get it from the following situations:

- Sexual contact with someone who is infected with hepatitis B
- A mother with hepatitis B spreading it to their baby during childbirth

- People with hepatitis B spreading it to children and other members of their household
- People who are exposed to blood or body fluids while at work (e.g., health care workers)
- Travel to parts of the world where hepatitis B is more common
- Getting tattoos, piercings, pedicures, manicures, or medical procedures with unclean equipment

Hepatitis B cannot be spread through touching objects, sneezing, coughing, hugging, or eating meals with someone who has hepatitis B.



How do I know if I have Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B can only be diagnosed by a blood test.

The blood tests will show if you:

- Had hepatitis B and got better
- Have hepatitis B now
- Have never had hepatitis B

If you have had the hepatitis B vaccine it is likely that you are protected against the infection for life.

People receiving cancer medications will be tested for hepatitis B before treatment begins. This includes those who have been vaccinated for hepatitis B.

If you have hepatitis B it can cause problems such as liver damage or liver failure during your treatment. Your cancer care team will need to plan your care so that the hepatitis does not cause any health problems for you during treatment.

How will my hepatitis B be managed during cancer treatment?

Your cancer care team will use your blood test results to plan how to care for your hepatitis B during your treatment. Your health care team may:

- Monitor your hepatitis B and your liver health through blood tests every 3 to 6 months
- Prescribe medicine to keep your liver healthy. You will take the medicine during your cancer treatment, and for up to 12 months after your cancer treatment ends.
- Refer you to a doctor that specializes in liver health to help look after your hepatitis B.

Talk to a member of your cancer care team for more information about your care and treatment.

Need this information in an accessible format?

1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511, info@ontariohealth.ca

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