

Hepatitis Awareness Much Needed

According to the CDC, there are 5 different types of Hepatitis, A, B, C, D and E. Although there is also mention of hepatitis F and G along with other kinds of virus's that affect the liver. I am only going to review the most common ones. So how does hepatitis affect us? Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. The liver is located on your upper right side and the tip can be felt just under the rib cage. The function of the liver is to filter harmful substances from your blood along with absorbing nutrients from your intestines. During these processes, your liver produces cholesterol, proteins and blood clotting factors. It also has the capacity to regenerate new cells if needed. But unfortunately, the liver can succumb to virus damage. It is important to note that Hepatitis C is the most common hepatitis today. I will briefly breakdown the various different types of hepatitis.

The hepatitis virus has basically the same signs and symptoms. You might experience abdominal pain, fatigue, nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite, muscle aches and pains. If the hepatitis has progressed you will experience dark colored urine, (tea colored) along with your skin turning a yellowish color along with intense itching. This is a result of the liver releasing toxins into your system. You might even notice the whites of your eyes, (sclera) turn yellow also. You might also notice pale color stools. Now let's look at the different types of the virus.

Hepatitis A Virus, (HAV)

This virus is contracted by the oral-fecal route. This possibly could happen if a person who is infected would handle the food you eat without washing their hands after using the toilet. It also can be contracted from eating fruits and vegetables that have been exposed to sewage run off. Exposure to Hep A can also be from eating raw seafood from polluted water, being in contact with someone who has the virus or drinking contaminated water. It is very contagious but usually doesn't leave one with permanent liver damage, although there is no specific treatment available, just good hydration and nutrition. The best way to protect yourself from HAV is to wash your hands, have proper sanitation and get the HAV – 2 shot series. Also avoid risky behaviors which could add to your exposure. Before the vaccine was available, approximately 35,000 people a year contracted HAV. Since the vaccine the incidences had gone down. The virus can live in the environment for several days.

Hepatitis B Virus, (HBV)

HBV is contracted through exposure of blood or bodily fluids that contain the virus of another person. This might happen through sharing dirty needles, sex with an infected person, needle sticks involving an infected person, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth. The virus can live on a dried surface for up to 7 days. HBV infections result in approximately 500,000 to 1,200,000 deaths per year worldwide. It can be prevented with a 3 shot series. To date, a booster is not normally needed, but if antibody levels do decline, then a booster can be given. People who mainly need HBV vaccinations are health care workers. It should be noted that Hepatitis B can possibly be contracted through **sharing personal items**

such as razors, or toothbrushes. (This might happen in dormitories.) Also be cautious of reusing nail clippers. Just remember that any tool re used that can cut skin can be a possible transmitter of HBV. Transmission cannot occur threw causal contact like dancing, hugging, shaking hands, using the same toilet or donating blood or swimming in the same pool. Remember, transmission between individuals is through blood or bodily fluid transmission. To prevent contracting Hepatitis B, use good hand washing technique along with getting the Hepatitis B vaccination. If you do contract this type of hepatitis, it could possibly lead to liver failure.

Some alarming statistics about HBV and HCV from the CDC:

- 500 million people worldwide are currently infected with the HBV or HCV
- This is 10 times more than those infected with HIV/AIDS
- HBV and HCV kill 1.5 million people a year
- 1 out of every 3 people have been exposed to either one or both of the viruses
- Most of the 500 million infected – DO NOT know

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

HCV is contracted through contaminated blood, blood transfusions prior to July 1992, and organs from an infected donor, exposure to an infected person or sharing personal items. This hepatitis can lead to cirrhosis which can result in liver transplants. The infection can result from basically the same ways HBV can be contracted, but the bad news is there is no cure or vaccination available. Unfortunately, HCV is the most common bloodborne illness and it is estimated that approximately 5 million people

living with this virus in the US are not aware they are infected; the symptoms are silent. According to the CDC, there are over 5,000 reported cases in Indiana in the year 2007. Anyone who has HCV should be vaccinated against HAV and HBV.

Hepatitis D Virus, (HDV)

Hepatitis D can only be contracted by those who already have HBV, so it can only be passed by infected individuals through dirty needles, unprotected sex or needle sticks. So again, Hepatitis B series of immunizations can protect you from this virus. You can't get HDV if you don't have HBV.

Hepatitis E Virus, (HEV)

This virus is transmitted through the oral fecal route, but at the present time is only seen in under developed countries where poor sanitation exists. It is contracted through drinking contaminated water. Research shows it is more prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. At the present time no vaccine exists.

Confirmation of any of these hepatitis's can be done by specific blood tests. If you exhibit any of the above symptoms, see your physician. To help protect you from these viruses's, practice good hand washing and protect yourself with the HAV & HBV series of vaccinations. If you are interested in vaccine protection, call The Health Department at 537-8826. Each of the vaccines are \$25.00 each. HAV is a series of 2 vaccinations and HBV is a series of three.

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