



HEPATITIS B

Hepatitis B is an inflammation of the liver caused by the **Hepatitis B Virus**.

Hepatitis B is one of the most common viral infections worldwide; about 2 Billion People have had an HBV infection, 300 – 420 Million People are chronically infected. That's about 5 – 7% of the world's population.

There are no actual numbers for HBV infections in South Africa available. But it is estimated that there is a large number of unknown cases.

Co-Infections with HIV are relatively common

A chronic HBV infection can cause cirrhosis of the liver (shrinking of the liver with loss of function) and may cause liver cancer. The therapy of chronic HBV is difficult; the best way to prevent an infection is through vaccination.

The Virus

Hepatitis B is caused by the Hepatitis B Virus that is mainly found in high concentrations in blood; but also in breast milk, semen, vaginal fluid, menstrual Blood and in very low concentration in saliva. After the infection, the virus enters the liver cell. Removing of the virus from the liver is than impossible. After the acute infection, the Virus lays dormant, but can be reactivated by i. e. a weakened immune system (HIV/AIDS).

How is the Virus transmitted?

The infection occurs with blood, but also in about 60 – 70 % during sexual Intercourse; as HBV can be found in all fluids that have a role during Sex. The smallest amount of Virus is enough to get infected. The risk increases if there is also blood involved. In exceptional cases even kissing can cause an infection.

I.V. Drug Use with needle sharing also poses a great risk of spreading the HB Virus, and so do Tattoos and Piercings with not properly disinfected tools. Sharing of toothbrushes, shaving utilities, and nail clippers etc. may transmit the virus.



The natural course of HBV infection

Between infection and disease lie about 2 - 6 Months. The progress of the Disease can be very different. About 2/3 have no or only mild, flulike symptoms like nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, pain in the upper abdomen, joint problems or skin alterations. 1/3 of the Patients may get an icterus with yellow colorations of the skin and mucous membranes, the conjunctiva, dark urine and light coloured faeces and strong itch.

With an uncomplicated acute Hepatitis B Symptoms will disappear after about 3 – 6 weeks. However it can also have a severe outcome up to liver failure.

How is the HBV found

The HB virus is found with a blood test that confirms virus particles and antibodies; build by the human immune system.

How can you protect yourself

The safest Prevention against Hepatitis B is a Vaccination, which protects for at least 10 years.

I.V. Drug Users should only use sterile needles and not share them.
Also do not share toothbrushes, nail clippers, razors, etc.
Use of condoms during Sex also reduces the risk of transmission.

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