Who should be immunised?

If you fall into one of the categories listed below then you may wish to contact your GP or practice nurse and talk to them about being immunised.

- Babies whose mothers have acute hepatitis B or are carriers of hepatitis B.
- People who inject drugs and share injecting equipment.
- People who change their sexual partners frequently and have unprotected sex, in particular men who have unprotected sex with other men.
- Close family contacts or sexual partners of someone with hepatitis B infection or who is a carrier of hepatitis B.
- Haemophiliacs
- People with chronic renal failure who dialyse.
- Health care workers and others whose jobs may put them at risk - such as morticians, etc.
- Staff and residents of residential accommodation for people with severe learning difficulties.
- People who are in prison.
- People intending to work, or spend a long period of time in a foreign country where hepatitis B is more common.

If you would like further information on Hepatitis B, please contact:

The Community Infection Control Nurse at your local Primary Care Trust (PCT)
your local Health Protection Unit or your local GUM/Sexual Health Clinic or
[http://www.hpa.org.uk/topics](http://www.hpa.org.uk/topics)
**What is Hepatitis B**

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis B is a virus that can cause an infection of the liver. Symptoms may include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Aching joints and tiredness
- Fever
- Jaundice - yellowing of skin and the whites of the eyes, dark urine and pale coloured stools/motions.

Hepatitis B can only be diagnosed by a laboratory blood test.

Many people have no symptoms at all, or will feel only mildly unwell. Most people will recover completely, getting rid of the virus from their bodies. However, a small number (2-10%) of people will go on to become carriers, and a few carriers may go on to develop serious, long-term liver problems like cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, or occasionally liver cancer.

**Who can it affect?**

Hepatitis B can affect anyone who is not immune, although some people will have a higher risk. These include:

- Anyone who injects (or has ever injected drugs) and has shared injecting equipment including needles, syringes, filters, spoons or water.
- Anyone who has had sex (homosexual or heterosexual) with an infected person without using a condom.
- Anyone who has had a sexually transmitted disease (they may have caught hepatitis B as well without realising it).
- People from parts of the world with a high prevalence e.g. Asia, Africa or people who have had medical or dental treatment in those areas.
- Babies born to mothers who have acute hepatitis B during pregnancy or to mothers who are carriers of hepatitis B.
- Close household contacts of someone with infectious hepatitis B.
- ‘Needlestick’ or sharps injuries sustained by healthcare personnel.
- People who have tattoos or body piercings.

**How is Hepatitis B caught?**

- Hepatitis B is passed from an infected person through the transfer of body fluids such as blood, semen, or vaginal secretions and very rarely saliva with blood in it.
- A pregnant woman with hepatitis B may pass the virus on to her child.
- From sharing needles and other injecting equipment, razors, toothbrushes, or any other article contaminated with infected blood.
- The Hepatitis B virus can enter the body via cuts or needle stick injuries or via open wounds such as weeping eczema.
- Hepatitis B **cannot pass through intact skin.**

**How do you prevent hepatitis B?**

- Practice safer sex (using a condom), especially if you change partners.
- Do not share injecting equipment, toothbrushes or razors.
- Always go to reputable places for tattooing, body piercing and electrolysis, and ask for a new unused sterile needle.
- Make sure you cover all cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters, especially on your hands.
- An effective vaccine is available so people at high risk of contracting hepatitis B should be immunised.
- Mothers are screened for Hepatitis B during pregnancy. The babies of those who test positive are immunised to prevent them developing Hepatitis B.

**What should I do if I think I am at risk?**

See your GP or practice nurse or, if appropriate the GUM / Sexual Health Clinic or Community Drugs Team, especially if you inject drugs and share injecting equipment or have had unprotected sex.

There is a blood test that can diagnose Hepatitis B and you may wish to discuss whether it would be appropriate for you to have this test.

Immunisation is available to anyone who may be at risk of contracting Hepatitis B. This is a course or 3 injections, plus a booster vaccination may be required.