



Hepatitis B FAQs for health professionals: Transmission, symptoms, and treatment

How is HBV transmitted?

HBV is transmitted through activities that involve percutaneous (i.e., puncture through the skin) or mucosal contact with infectious blood or body fluids (e.g., semen and saliva), including

- sex with an infected partner
- injection-drug use that involves sharing needles, syringes, or drug-preparation equipment
- birth to an infected mother
- contact with blood from or open sores on an infected person
- exposures to needle sticks or sharp instruments
- sharing certain items with an infected person that can break the skin or mucous membranes (e.g., razors, toothbrushes, and glucose monitoring equipment), potentially resulting in exposure to blood.

How long does HBV survive outside the body?

HBV can survive outside the body and remains infectious for at least seven days ([1](#)).

What should be used to clean environmental surfaces potentially contaminated with HBV?

Any blood spills (including dried blood, which can still be infectious) should be disinfected using a 1:10 dilution of one-part household bleach to 10 parts of water. Gloves should be worn when cleaning up any blood spills.

Who should be treated?

Treatment does not usually cure hepatitis B and not everyone with the virus will need it. Anti-viral treatments for hepatitis B (entecavir and tenofovir) aim to suppress the virus and lower the viral load (HBV DNA). Chronic hepatitis B usually requires lifelong treatment; this is well tolerated and will prolong survival. Refer to the Hepatitis Foundation of New Zealand's GP management pack for further information.

References

1. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention CfDCA. Hepatitis B questions and answers for Health Professionals. In: Services US Dept. of Health and Human Resources, editor. 2019.