



Hepatitis D

What is hepatitis D?

Hepatitis D is a viral infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis D virus. Hepatitis D virus can only infect a person who also is infected with hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis D can cause an infection at the same time as the initial hepatitis B infection (coinfection), or it can infect a person with existing, lifelong (chronic) hepatitis B infection (superinfection). Hepatitis D can lead to chronic infection and can cause serious liver damage (cirrhosis) and death. Hepatitis D is not common in North Dakota or in the United States.

Who is at risk for hepatitis D?

Anyone can get hepatitis D, but those at greater risk include:

- Injection drug users.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Sex contacts of infected people.
- Hemodialysis patients.
- Health-care and public safety workers who have contact with infected blood.
- Infants born to infected mothers (very rare).

What are the symptoms of hepatitis D?

Symptoms of hepatitis D are the same as those of hepatitis B and may include tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, vomiting, joint pain, dark urine or jaundice (i.e., yellowing of skin or whites of eyes). Some people recover fully, but some carry the virus in their blood for a lifetime.

How soon do symptoms appear?

For hepatitis D coinfection, symptoms may appear 45 to 160 days after exposure, but symptoms usually appear within 90 days. For hepatitis D superinfection, symptoms may appear two to eight weeks after exposure.

How is hepatitis D spread?

Hepatitis D virus can be found in the blood and body fluids of an infected person. It is spread by direct contact with infected body fluids, usually by sexual contact, sharing needles or needle stick injury. Hepatitis D virus is not spread by casual contact or by respiratory secretions.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

The virus can be found in blood and other body fluids before symptoms appear and may persist for several months afterward. People who become long-term carriers of the virus may remain contagious for the course of their lifetime.

How is a person diagnosed?

A health-care professional can make a positive diagnosis using several blood tests.

What is the treatment?

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person once the symptoms appear.

Does past infection make a person immune?

Yes. The person is still at risk for other hepatitis infections (such as A and C), however.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have hepatitis D?

A child with known hepatitis D should be excluded if he or she exhibits any of the following:

- Weeping sores that cannot be covered
- Biting or scratching behavior
- A bleeding problem
- Generalized dermatitis that may produce wounds or weepy tissue fluids
- Unable to participate in routine activities, needs more care than can be provided by staff, or meets other exclusion criteria, such as fever with behavioral change

The child can be readmitted to a group setting when skin sores are dry or covered, when the child is cleared to return by a health professional, or when the child is able to participate in activities.

What can be done to prevent the spread of hepatitis D?

Because hepatitis D cannot be transmitted in the absence of hepatitis B infection, hepatitis B vaccination protects against hepatitis D infection. A vaccine to prevent hepatitis B has been available for several years. It is safe and effective and is recommended for infants, children and adolescents. Adults at increased risk of hepatitis B/hepatitis D infection who have not already been infected also should be immunized. People with chronic hepatitis B infection should take extreme care to avoid exposure to hepatitis D by reducing risk behaviors (not sharing toothbrushes, razors, needles or any other objects that may have become contaminated with blood). In addition, infected people must not donate blood and should inform their health-care providers so that proper health care can be provided.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics. [Section 3, Summaries of Infectious Diseases]. In: Pickering LK, ed. *Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:[page 340]

