

FACT SHEET

HEPATITIS D

(Viral hepatitis D, Hepatitis delta virus, Delta agent hepatitis, Delta associated hepatitis)

What is hepatitis D?

Hepatitis D is a virus that infects the liver. Hepatitis D, or Delta hepatitis, is always associated with a hepatitis B infection. A person may recover from Delta hepatitis or it may progress to chronic hepatitis.

Who gets hepatitis D?

Hepatitis D can only occur if the person has hepatitis B. Hepatitis D virus (HDV) and hepatitis B virus (HBV) may infect a person at the same time or HDV infection may occur in persons with chronic HBV infection.

How is the virus spread?

The hepatitis D virus is spread by exposure to blood and serous body fluids, contaminated needles and syringes, and via sexual transmission.

What are the symptoms?

Onset of hepatitis D is usually sudden. Symptoms include tiredness, nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, tea-colored urine, and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice). Hepatitis D infection in someone with chronic hepatitis B may be misdiagnosed as a worsening of chronic hepatitis B.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

Symptoms occur approximately 2 - 8 weeks after infection.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

A person can spread the virus as long as it remains in their blood. The highest risk of exposure occurs just before the onset of acute illness.

How is hepatitis D diagnosed?

A blood test is used to detect infection with the hepatitis D virus.

Can a person get hepatitis D again?

If antibodies develop, one infection with the hepatitis D virus protects a person from getting it again. Since there are different kinds of hepatitis, infection with hepatitis D will not stop a person from getting other types of hepatitis.

What is the treatment for hepatitis D?

There is no specific treatment that can make the infection go away. People who are sick with hepatitis D should see a doctor for advice about how to control their symptoms.

What can be done if a person comes into contact with someone infected with hepatitis D?

If the person does not have hepatitis B, they will not get hepatitis D. If the person has hepatitis B there is nothing that can be done to protect the person from hepatitis D. Hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG), immune globulin (IG) and hepatitis B vaccine do not protect hepatitis B carriers from infection by HDV.

How can infection with hepatitis D be prevented?

Never share needles for drug use, ear piercing, tattooing, or any other purpose. Avoid contact with the blood or wound drainage of any other person. Use condoms when having sex.

Is there a vaccine to prevent hepatitis D?

Yes, there is a vaccine to protect against hepatitis D. For those persons not previously infected with hepatitis B the hepatitis B vaccine will protect them. This works by protecting against hepatitis B, which in turn protects against HDV. Protection is given because only people infected with hepatitis B virus can become infected with hepatitis D virus.