

## THE ABC'S OF HEPATITIS

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Do you understand the differences of the various forms of hepatitis? In order to clarify the differences, the following outline presents the routes of transmission, their common sources, the incubation periods, when a person is contagious, the severity of the illnesses, and prevention treatments for each.

### HEPATITIS A

*Route of transmission:* Fecal-oral

*Common sources:* Poor sanitation, contaminated food and water

*Incubation period:* 2-6 weeks

*Contagious:* 2 weeks before symptoms to 1 week after symptoms

*Severity:* Death is uncommon, does not cause chronic hepatitis chronic hepatitis or carrier state

*Prevention:* a 2 dose vaccine is 96% effective

### HEPATITIS B

*Route of transmission:* Blood and bodily fluids

*Common sources:* Sharing needles with IV drug use, blood contaminated injuries (needlestick), mother to baby at delivery, unprotected sexual contact (especially anal intercourse)

*Incubation period:* 6 weeks to 6 months

*Contagious:* As long as test positive usually <3 months, but may be lifetime

*Severity:* <1% die from acute hepatitis, but chronic hepatitis occurs in 1-2% adults & 90% infant with 25-40% becoming carriers with increased risk of cirrhosis or liver cancer

*Prevention:* a 3 dose vaccine is 97% effective

## **HEPATITIS C**

*Route of transmission:* Blood and bodily fluids

*Common sources:* 50% from IV drug use now, prior to 1991 was from blood transfusions, now only 1 in 200,000 transfusions, blood contaminated injuries, mother to baby at delivery, tattooing (sharing of needles)

*Incubation period:* 6 weeks to 6 months

*Contagious:* 15% - <3 months, 85% - lifetime

*Severity:* 50+% develop chronic hepatitis, with 30% of these developing cirrhosis or liver cancer, 40% of all liver disease in US, 51% of liver transplants, might be most common cause of primary liver cancer in US.

*Prevention:* No vaccine, avoid sharing razors and toothbrushes, cover wounds with dressings, self clean-up of blood spills

*Symptoms:* All forms of hepatitis can have similar symptoms with varying degrees of severity: fatigue, right upper quadrant pain/tenderness, nausea, poor appetite, muscle and joint pains.

*Treatment:* Bed rest in acute phase (3-16 wks) as needed with gradual return to normal activities, with the majority having complete recovery. Avoid physical exertion, alcohol, and medications that may be toxic to the liver (check with your MD). Antiviral medications are

being developed for treatment of chronic hepatitis B & C. The best treatment however is prevention by use of the vaccine and avoiding the risky behaviors listed previously in this article.