What is Hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B is a disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV).
- Most adults who have HBV infection will recover in 6 – 12 months without treatment.
- However, children and some adults can develop chronic (lifelong) hepatitis B infection.

What are signs of Hepatitis B?

- When you first get HBV infection, it is called “Acute”.
- Signs of acute HBV infection include:
  - yellow skin or eyes tiredness
  - fever, nausea or vomiting
  - stomach pain or loss of appetite
  - grey-colored stools, dark urine, and joint pain
- You can have acute HBV infection and not have any signs.
- Most adults who have acute HBV infection will recover in 6 – 12 months without treatment.
- If your body cannot get rid of HBV infection, it can become a chronic (lifelong) illness.
- A person with chronic HBV infection may not show signs for as long as 20 to 30 years, but HBV may still damage your liver during those years.
- Having chronic untreated HBV infection can lead to cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver or liver cancer.

How do I know if I am at risk for HBV infection?

You can be at risk for HBV infection if you:

- Share needles.
- Are a injection drug user.
- Have sexual contacts with a person known to be hepatitis B positive.
- Are a man who has sex with men.
- Are HIV-positive.
- Are on hemodialysis.
- Are a person needing immunosuppressive therapy, including chemotherapy, immunosuppression related to organ transplantation, and immunosuppression for rheumatologic or gastroenterologic disorders.
- Have elevated ALT/AST of unknown etiology.
- Donate blood, plasma, organs, tissue, or semen.
- Were born to an hepatitis B positive mother.
- Are the source of blood or body fluids for exposure that might require post-exposure prophylaxis (e.g., needlestick, sexual assault).
- Plan on being vaccinate for hepatitis B.
- Were born in a region of high and intermediate HBV endemicity.
- Are a U.S. born person not vaccinated as an infant and your parents were born in regions with high HBV endemicity.

Getting the Hepatitis B vaccine is the best way to be protected from getting Hepatitis B infection.
How can I be protected from HBV?
- Get tested: HBV testing is recommended for all Veterans who are at risk or who want to be tested.
- Your VA provider can order the HBV blood test.
  - Results are usually available in 1-2 weeks and will let you know whether you have HBV infection or if you can benefit from HBV vaccination.

Should I get the Hepatitis B vaccine?
- Yes. Discuss HBV vaccine with your health care provider if you test negative for HBV infection. The hepatitis B vaccine is safe for pregnant women and their babies.

If I have HBV infection can I get treatment from VA?
- Yes. Treatment for HBV is available from VA. Talk to your VA health care provider about Hepatitis B treatment.

What can I do to avoid HBV?
Getting the HBV vaccine for is the best way to prevent infection. Other ways to prevent HBV infection include:
- Avoiding sexual contact.
- Reducing your number of sexual partners.
- Having sex with only one partner who does not have sex with others and does not have HBV infection.
- Using condoms (male or female) correctly during sex.
- Not sharing needles, syringes or other drug equipment.
- Making sure of sterile tools, clean hands and gloves, and disinfected work surfaces during tattooing or body piercing.
- Wearing gloves when in contact with another person's blood.
- Do not use another person's toothbrush, razor, nail clippers or other personal items if you know they have HBV.

Where can I find more information?