

# Blood-borne infections

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There is potential risk that you were exposed to the blood-borne infections: hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or HIV. Being informed helps you decide if you want to get tested for these viruses.

This fact sheet provides information about viruses that are carried in the blood or body fluids, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. This fact sheet also contains information about the precautionary steps you should follow if you decide to get tested and while you wait for your test results.

Hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are infections that can be spread through blood-to-blood contact or contact with body fluids from someone who is infected. This includes, for example, through sexual contact, sharing needles, needle-stick injuries, birth or breastfeeding, as well as medical or dental equipment that was not properly sterilized. These infections can also spread through improper infection control practices in medical offices.

Many people who have hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HIV have no symptoms. A person can be infected and not be aware and could spread the virus to other people without knowing it. **The only way to know if you are infected is to get tested.**

## Safety steps to follow while you wait for your test results for blood-borne infections

While you wait for your test results for the hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV, you should follow these instructions to prevent the risk of spreading the infection to others:

- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, or any personal hygiene equipment that could contain blood (you might not be able to see blood on the item).

- Cover any open cuts and sores with a bandage.
- Do not share glucose or blood sugar testing equipment.
- Do not share any kind of needle such as those used for steroids, tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture, or street drugs.
- Do not share any drug use equipment such as pipes, straws, syringes, spoons, filters, straps or water.
- Reduce the risk for sexual partners by practising safer sex and always using condoms and dental dams; advising your sexual partners that you are being tested; abstaining from sexual activity; reducing your number of sexual partners.
- Clean up blood spills with a solution of one-part bleach to nine-parts water (1:9).
- Place disposable, blood-soiled articles in plastic garbage bags.
- Do not donate blood, body organs, other tissues, or semen.
- If you are pregnant, notify your health care provider or midwife that you are being tested for blood-borne infections.
- If you are breastfeeding, contact your local public health unit for Point of Care testing (Rapid HIV testing).

For more information about hepatitis B and C, and HIV, or vaccinations, please contact your local public health unit. You can find your local public health unit by visiting:  
<https://www.phdapps.health.gov.on.ca/PHULocator/>.

## Blood-borne infections continued

Blood Borne Infections	Symptoms	Symptoms can occur	Treatment & Testing
<p><b>Hepatitis B</b> is a liver infection that causes short term illness in most adults. For a small number, it can cause long term illness and lead to liver damage and liver cancer. Many Canadians have received vaccines to prevent this infection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• nausea and vomiting</li> <li>• fatigue</li> <li>• stomach pain</li> <li>• joint pain</li> <li>• decreased appetite</li> <li>• fever</li> <li>• yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)</li> <li>• dark urine, pale stools</li> </ul>	<p>2 to 5 months after exposure</p>	<p>Most adults recover fully from the virus within 6 months and develop protective immunity.</p> <p>Less commonly, some adults (about 2%-6%) develop a lifelong, or chronic, infection.</p> <p>Chronic infection means that the virus remains in a person's body, often without their knowledge, and it can easily be passed on to other people.</p> <p>There is no cure; however, treatments are available to manage the infection.</p> <p><b>Testing is generally recommended after any exposure.</b></p>
<p><b>Hepatitis C</b> is a liver infection that can cause long term illness in over half of people who are infected. Long term illness may lead to liver damage and liver cancer. There is no vaccine.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• nausea and vomiting</li> <li>• fatigue</li> <li>• stomach pain</li> <li>• decreased appetite</li> <li>• dark urine, pale stools</li> <li>• yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)</li> <li>• fever, joint pain</li> </ul>	<p>2 weeks to 6 months after exposure</p>	<p>About one in four people recover from hepatitis C on their own, but most people need treatment to cure chronic hepatitis C.</p> <p>Antiviral medications can cure most people with hepatitis C. Treatments are simple to take, have few side effects, and are usually taken for 12 weeks or less.</p> <p><b>Testing is generally recommended right after exposure and then again 6 months after exposure.</b></p>
<p><b>HIV</b> (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). It is found in blood and other body fluids. HIV attacks the immune system. There is no vaccine.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fever, fatigue</li> <li>• headache</li> <li>• sore throat</li> <li>• swollen lymph nodes</li> <li>• oral ulcers and/or genital ulcers</li> <li>• upper body rash</li> </ul>	<p>2 to 4 weeks after exposure</p>	<p>HIV is a lifelong infection. Treatments are available to reduce the amount of virus in the body, help keep the immune system healthy and reduce the risk of passing the infection to others.</p> <p>Treatment and management are dependent on the stage of the infection.</p> <p><b>Testing is generally recommended after any exposure.</b></p>