



DID YOU KNOW?

AN INFORMATION SHEET FOR ST. JOHN AMBULANCE MEMBERS

HEPATITIS B

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DID YOU KNOW that Hepatitis B is a viral infection that occurs worldwide and that 10% of all infected adults become chronic carriers who can still transmit the virus?

Hepatitis B is found in all body secretions and excretions, but blood, saliva, semen and vaginal secretions are the most infectious. The virus may also be spread by contaminated needles, tattoos, ear and body piercing, syringes and intravenous equipment, as well as by contamination of wounds or cuts or the exposure of the mucus membranes to infected blood or body fluids.

The virus can be spread many weeks before symptoms occur, while the person has symptoms and during the chronic carrier stage, which may last a lifetime.

Once infected it may take 14-180 days to come down with symptoms. People with acute hepatitis have a gradual loss of appetite, vague abdominal discomfort, nausea and vomiting and often jaundice (yellowing of the skin). Fever may be absent or mild.

Emergency Service Workers are at the greatest risk of exposure to Hepatitis B through:

- Contact with infected blood or body fluids without protective equipment
- Needlestick or other sharp injury
- Human bite

Preventative measures include:

- Hepatitis B vaccination with antibody level greater than 10 IU/L 4-6 weeks after the series of vaccines
- Gloves should be worn when contact with blood or saliva may occur
- Protective eyewear and masks are indicated if potential contact with blood/body fluid to the face could occur
- Decontamination of equipment and surfaces with blood or body fluids
- Do not eat or drink until the above has been done after patient care

Hepatitis B vaccination may be available for purchase at a reduced fee from your provincial Council and taken to your family physician for administration. Alternatively, the vaccine may be available free of charge for those First Aid personnel that also work in hospitals or with other Emergency Service agencies. Most drug plans also cover the cost of the vaccine.

For more information on Hepatitis B check the Health Canada website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca