

# DISPATCH

## HEPATITIS D VIRUS



### What Is It?

Hepatitis D (HDV) is a viral infection that only infects individuals who are also infected with hepatitis B virus. Approximately 5% of those with hepatitis B also have hepatitis D.

### How can you get it?

Hepatitis D is transmitted just as hepatitis B, through contact with the blood or body fluids of a person infected with HDV. The risk factors are similar:

- Exposure to blood through a needle stick or cut from sharp instrument
- Contact with blood or open sores of an infected patient to mucous membranes or broken skin
- Sharing personal care items with an infected person (ex. razors, toothbrushes)
- Injection Drug Use, Sexual Activity, Mother-to-Child

HDV presents in two different forms:

- Co-infection Infection with HDV and HBV at the same time
- Superinfection Infection with HBV first, then later infection with HDV

### What are the symptoms?

HDV can worsen an acute or chronic hepatitis B infection. The signs and symptoms of hepatitis D may include:

- Fatigue
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (called jaundice)
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea and/or vomiting

The symptoms typically last 2 to 3 weeks but complications of HDV infection include chronic liver inflammation in 10% of those infected. Complete liver failure may also occur. Those who experience a co-infection with HBV are likely to recover while those with a superinfection are more likely to develop chronic infection and liver failure.

# DISPATCH



## How do you prevent it?

The “best way to prevent hepatitis D is to be vaccinated against hepatitis B.” You can help prevent the spread of HDV by following a comprehensive [OSHA required program for Bloodborne pathogen exposures](#) which includes the following:

- Getting vaccinated against Hepatitis B
- Prompt treatment of any Hepatitis B infection
- Sharps Safety
  - Training and consistent use of safer needle techniques and devices
  - Proper sharp disposal
- Using Universal Precautions
  - Hand hygiene (wash with soap and water or using an alcohol based hand rub)
  - Personal protective equipment (PPE) (gloves, gowns, masks and goggles that offer mouth, nose and eye protection)
  - Proper handling and disposal of instruments/devices and clothing contaminated with blood or body fluids

## What should you do if you are exposed to the disease or get the disease?

### Immediately following an exposure:

- Wash needlesticks and cuts with soap and water
- Flush splashes to the nose, mouth, or skin with water
- Irrigate eyes with clean water, saline, or sterile solutions

### As soon as possible, report the exposure and seek medical care

- Determining hepatitis B status is important since the bloodborne pathogen hepatitis D is an incomplete virus that requires hepatitis B infection.
  - If you are exposed to hepatitis B, it is an OSHA requirement that you are offered an evaluation for [bloodborne pathogen exposure](#).
  - This will include having blood drawn as soon as possible to determine your baseline serologic status. This test determines if you have protective antibodies.
  - If you do not have protective antibodies to hepatitis B, your healthcare provider may decide to give you the vaccine and/or hepatitis B Immune Globulin (HBIG) for immediate protection.

# DISPATCH



The medication alpha interferon has been used to manage some of the inflammation but there is no cure for hepatitis D. Since hepatitis D can be acquired following infection with hepatitis B, those infected with hepatitis B should protect their liver from further damage, by getting immunized for hepatitis A, avoiding alcohol, avoiding risk factors listed above and having continuing medical care.

## For More Information and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), Check Out:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HDV/index.htm>
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID): <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/TOPICS/HEPATITIS/HEPATITISD/Pages/Default.aspx>
- Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC): [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hcai-iamss/bbp-pts/hepatitis/hep\\_d-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hcai-iamss/bbp-pts/hepatitis/hep_d-eng.php)