

Screening for Hepatitis B Virus Infection in Nonpregnant Adolescents and Adults

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) has issued a **final** recommendation statement on *Screening for Hepatitis B Virus Infection in Nonpregnant Adolescents and Adults*.

This final recommendation statement applies only to teens and adults who are at high risk of becoming infected with hepatitis B. Within this group, the final recommendation applies to those who do not have signs or symptoms of hepatitis B infection and those who have not already been vaccinated against the virus. It does not apply to teenage or adult pregnant

women. The Task Force has a separate recommendation on screening for Hepatitis B during pregnancy (see the link to this recommendation at the end of this document).

The final recommendation statement summarizes what the Task Force learned about the potential benefits and harms of hepatitis B screening: People who are at high risk for infection should be screened.

This fact sheet explains this recommendation and what it might mean for you.

What is hepatitis B infection?

Hepatitis B is one of several viruses that can damage the liver. The virus is spread through contact with infected blood or body fluids. Hepatitis B can be transmitted from an infected mother to her baby at birth. It can also be transmitted through sex with an infected person or by sharing injection drug equipment.

Facts About Hepatitis B Infection

Hepatitis B infection is not very common in the overall U.S. population. However, it is more common among certain high-risk groups.

These groups include:

- People who were born in countries where hepatitis B is common
- U.S.-born people who were not vaccinated against hepatitis B when they were babies and whose parents came from countries where hepatitis B is common
- People with HIV infection, who have a weakened immune system, or are being treated for kidney failure with dialysis
- Injection drug users
- People living with or having sex with people infected with hepatitis B
- Men who have sex with men

Many times, when people become infected with hepatitis B, they have no signs or symptoms of the infection. They can spread the virus to others without knowing it. Most of those who get the infection recover fully and develop immunity against the virus. They cannot pass on the virus to anyone else once they have recovered.

Some people, however, do not completely get rid of the virus. It remains in their body for the rest of their lives. This is called chronic hepatitis B infection and people who have it can infect others. It is thought that between 700,000 to two million people in the United States have chronic hepatitis B infection.

About 15% to 25% of people with chronic hepatitis B infection develop serious liver problems, including cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, or liver failure. These liver problems can take decades to develop, and people may have no signs or symptoms that the damage is occurring.

Hepatitis B can be prevented with vaccination. This vaccination is very effective, and in the United States it is recommended for all babies, anyone younger than 19 who did not get vaccinated as a baby, and adults who are at high risk for getting the infection.

Screening and Treatment for Hepatitis B Infection

Screening for chronic hepatitis B infection involves simple blood tests that look for certain antibodies (disease-fighting proteins).

Treatment for chronic hepatitis includes regular monitoring by a health care professional and sometimes antiviral medicines (medicines that slow down the virus).

Potential Benefits and Harms of Hepatitis B Screening and Treatment

The Task Force reviewed studies on the benefits and harms of screening for and treatment of hepatitis B infection.

The Task Force found that screening tests accurately identify people who are infected with hepatitis B. Earlier detection can help prevent complications and reduce the spread of the infection. Treatment with antiviral medicines may reduce the risk of developing liver cancer.

The Task Force found that hepatitis B screening has some potential harms, including anxiety or feelings of stigma. Hepatitis B treatment has side effects, including tiredness, nausea, headache, and joint and muscle pain. These side effects usually go away after treatment ends.

While screening and treatment can be effective, it is important to remember that hepatitis B infection is not common in the general U.S. population, and most infected individuals do not develop complications.

The Final Recommendation on Screening for Hepatitis B Infection: What Does It Mean?

Here is the Task Force's final recommendation on screening for hepatitis B infection. Task Force recommendation grades are based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of screening. They also are based on the size of the potential benefits and harms. Task Force recommendation grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When the Task Force recommends screening (**Grade B**), it is because it has more potential benefits than potential harms. The Notes explain key ideas.

Visit the Task Force Web site to read the full [final recommendation statement](#). The statement explains the evidence the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grade. An [evidence document](#) provides more detail about the studies the Task Force reviewed.

1 The Task Force concludes that *persons at high risk* for infection should be *screened* for hepatitis B virus infection. **Grade B**

Notes

1 *persons at high risk*
People who are more likely to get infected or to pass on the infection.

screened

Testing a blood sample to determine whether a person is infected with hepatitis B now or was infected in the past.

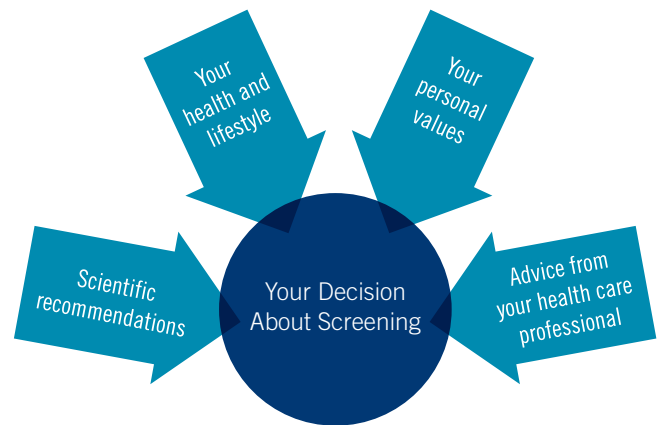
Should You Be Screened for Hepatitis B Infection?

Getting the best health care means making smart decisions about what screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines to get and when to get them. Many people don't get the tests or counseling they need. Others get tests or counseling they don't need or that may be harmful to them.

Task Force recommendations can help you learn about screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines. These services can keep you healthy and prevent disease. The Task Force recommendations do not cover diagnosis (tests to find out why you are sick) or treatment of disease. Task Force recommendations also apply to some groups of people, but not others. For example, this recommendation does not apply to people who have been vaccinated against hepatitis B.

Deciding Whether to Get Screened for Hepatitis B Infection

The Task Force recommends that people at high risk for hepatitis B infection be screened for the infection. In following this recommendation, your doctor or nurse may offer you a hepatitis B test. However, you can choose to decline. If you have questions, talk to your doctor or nurse about hepatitis B infection, the test, and the meaning of positive and negative results. Be comfortable that all your questions have been answered. When deciding whether to get screened, think about your own lifestyle (both now and in the past), personal beliefs, and preferences for health care. Consider scientific recommendations, like this one from the Task Force. Use this information to become fully informed and to decide whether getting a hepatitis B test is right for you.







What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?

The Task Force is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, or preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a draft recommendation statement. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the **final recommendation statement**. To learn more, visit the [Task Force Web site](#).

USPSTF Recommendation Grades	
Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.

Click Here to Learn More About Hepatitis B

-  [Protect Yourself from Hepatitis B \(healthfinder.gov\)](#)
-  [Hepatitis B Factsheet \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\)](#)
-  [Hepatitis B Information for the Public \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\)](#)
-  [Hepatitis B \(MedlinePlus\)](#)

[Click Here for Related Task Force Recommendation](#)

-  [Screening for Hepatitis B Virus Infection in Pregnancy \(June 2009\)](#)