

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Hepatitis B in Association with the Mission of Mercy Dental Clinic

1. What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that causes inflammation in the liver. Most people recover from hepatitis B without any problem. Some people go on to develop chronic infection with hepatitis B. These people may not feel sick, but they can still spread hepatitis to others. Complications of chronic infection rarely include cirrhosis or liver cancer.

2. How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by blood or body fluids. Hepatitis B can be spread by having sex with someone who is infected. Hepatitis B can also be spread from an infected mother to her infant. Injection drug users spread hepatitis by sharing used needles or syringes.

Infected blood that gets into a cut in your skin can spread hepatitis B. Infected blood that gets into your mouth, nose or eyes can also spread hepatitis B. Blood for transfusion is screened for hepatitis B virus, so infection from transfusion is now rare.

Hepatitis B is not spread through dental care when standard practices are followed and all equipment functions properly. Hepatitis B might be spread from dental equipment that is not properly cleaned between patients.

3. What if I am pregnant?

All pregnant women should be screened for hepatitis B infection when they get prenatal care. Talk to your doctor about your concerns.

If a woman is a hepatitis B carrier, her baby can get vaccine at the time of birth to greatly reduce the chance of being infected.

4. How would I know if I had hepatitis B?

Not everybody with hepatitis B has symptoms. Symptoms include: fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, yellow color in the skin or eyes, dark urine, light colored stool, feeling tired, or not feeling well.

The only way to tell for sure if someone has hepatitis B is through a blood test.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Hepatitis B in Association with the Mission of Mercy Dental Clinic



5. Who is receiving notification letters about hepatitis B infection?

Notification letters are being mailed to patients who received dental services at the Mission of Mercy Clinic at Hedgesville, West Virginia on June 26-27, 2009. Letters are also being mailed to volunteers who participated in the clinic.

6. Why are notification letters being sent to patients and volunteers?

Three patients and 2 clinic volunteers developed hepatitis B after the MOM clinic. The only risk these patients have in common was attendance at the MOM clinic. The timing of symptoms for patients and clinic volunteers is consistent with exposure around the time of the MOM clinic.

While the risk to other persons who attended the clinic is probably very small, we feel it is important to notify everyone who was at the clinic and encourage them to be tested.

7. How many people are receiving notification letters?

Notification letters are being mailed to 1,137 patients and 826 volunteers.

8. What exactly are you recommending for MOM patients?

MOM patients: We are encouraging all MOM patients to be tested for hepatitis B, C and HIV. While we have no evidence that hepatitis C or HIV were transmitted at the MOM clinic, these viruses can also be transmitted by exposure to blood and body fluids.

You may consult your healthcare provider or obtain counseling and testing services free of charge at your local health department. Be sure to take a copy of the notification letter with you to your local health department or to your healthcare provider when you go for counseling or testing.

9. What exactly are you recommending for MOM staff and volunteers?

Staff and volunteers: Hepatitis B is typically spread through contact with infectious blood or body fluids, therefore we are recommending testing for volunteers and staff who were involved with direct patient care or who had contact with medical equipment or the patient care environment. If you volunteered, but did not meet these criteria, you do not need to be tested for hepatitis B, C or HIV. However, if you have questions or concerns about potential exposures or risks, please contact your local health department for information.

Healthcare personnel who have direct contact with blood or body fluids in their jobs should have been vaccinated against hepatitis B. If you have been vaccinated against hepatitis B and

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Hepatitis B in Association with the Mission of Mercy Dental Clinic

you are sure you are immune, you do not need to be tested for hepatitis B. However, hepatitis B vaccine does not protect against hepatitis C or HIV, so if you had patient contact or contact with equipment or the patient care environment, you should still be tested for hepatitis C and HIV.

To obtain counseling and testing services free of charge, contact your local health department. You may also contact your healthcare provider. Be sure to take a copy of the notification letter to your local health department or to your healthcare provider when you go in for counseling or testing.

Unrelated to potential exposure in the MOM clinic, if you are a healthcare provider who has contact with blood or body fluids in your job and have never been vaccinated against hepatitis B, you should get vaccinated. Contact your local health department or your occupational health clinic for more information.

10. How will I find out the results of my testing?

The local health department or your healthcare provider will share the results with you. Your results will be kept confidential.

11. What happens if I test positive?

You should talk to your physician about treatment options and recommendations for follow up. Your local health department can also help answer many of the questions you might have.

12. If I test positive for hepatitis, does that mean I got it at the MOM clinic?

Not necessarily. Hepatitis B can spread many other ways. Hepatitis B virus infection can be present for months or years without causing any symptoms. It can be difficult or impossible to tell where and how a person became infected with hepatitis B. If you test positive, your local health department can discuss these issues with you in detail.

About 0.5 to 1.5% of US-born persons have chronic hepatitis B infection. Approximately 1 to 4% of persons in the United States have antibodies to hepatitis C. It is very possible that some people will test positive for hepatitis B or C, and we may not know how, where, or when they became infected.

13. What happened at the clinic?

During the investigation, professionals who worked at the clinic described appropriate practices and conditions for the dental care that was provided. Since the dental services were provided in a temporary setting, it was not possible to inspect the clinic or assess everything that happened there. Investigation suggested that some equipment may not have always been cleaned

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Hepatitis B in Association with the Mission of Mercy Dental Clinic

properly or always functioned properly in this setting. Investigation also suggested that there was no infection preventionist involved in most aspects of clinic planning and operations. An infection preventionist is an expert who specializes in preventing infections in healthcare settings.

14. What if I don't want to be tested?

We encourage you to talk to your local health department before you make a decision regarding testing. The local health department will help you understand the risk to you and your family. However, the final decision is up to you.

15. Why are you offering testing for hepatitis B and C and HIV?

Five cases of acute hepatitis B were identified in patients and volunteers who participated in the MOM clinic. That is why testing for hepatitis B is being offered. No new cases of hepatitis C or HIV were identified in people who participated in the clinic. We are offering hepatitis C and HIV testing because these viruses can also be spread through exposure to infected blood and body fluids.

While the individual risk of disease from participation in this clinic is probably very small, we are offering testing to persons who attended the Hedgesville clinic. It is important for you to know if you are infected because you should be evaluated for treatment options if you test positive.

16. Do I need to do anything to protect my family from hepatitis B if I was a patient at this clinic?

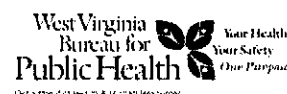
To make absolutely certain, you can get tested for hepatitis B, C and HIV. Until then, you can practice safe sex and avoid sharing household items like razors and nail grooming equipment. Do not donate blood and do not sign up to be an organ donor until you know your status. Of course, never share needles or syringes.

Hepatitis B is not spread through sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing or sneezing.

17. If I already have hepatitis, should I still get tested?

You should still talk to your local health department about being tested. There are 3 major types of viral hepatitis commonly found in the US: hepatitis A, B, and C. There are other types of hepatitis not caused by viruses. People with another type of hepatitis are still at risk of getting hepatitis B infection. Your local health department or provider can counsel you depending on your particular situation.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Hepatitis B in Association with the Mission of Mercy Dental Clinic



18. Why did notification take so long?

Cases were first reported in November, 2009. Investigation into the source of the infections included detailed interviews of patients and professionals who worked at the clinic. The search for additional unreported cases (none were found) involved contacting health officials in neighboring states and exhaustive searches through medical records. In short, the investigation was extensive and time-consuming.

19. What is being done to prevent the possibility of disease transmission through MOM or other similar dental clinics in the future?

MOM officials from Virginia and North Carolina were notified about the situation and requested not to hold clinics in West Virginia until the investigation was completed. Health officials have investigated the situation, and have made recommendations to MOM clinic personnel aimed at assuring patient and occupational health and safety. They recommend that future MOM or similar dental clinics should only be held in West Virginia if such recommendations can be adhered to. Excerpts of recommendations include:

Involvement of an Infection Preventionist in clinic planning and operations.

Infection control policies and procedures should be in writing and clinic management should assure that policies and procedures are followed.

Environmental cleaning and disinfection should be performed according to standard guidelines.

Each patient should be educated about benefits and risks of all procedures and informed that clinic services will be halted if health and safety cannot be assured. Patients should also be advised where and how to obtain follow up services, if needed.

In addition, WV public health officials will discuss with the Board of Dental Examiners strategies for alerting licensed dental professionals about infection control recommendations in this and other settings where care is provided.

20. What can I do to prevent hepatitis B in the future?

Hepatitis B vaccination is safe and effective. Learn more about the vaccine so you can protect yourself and your family. Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for:

All infants, starting with the first dose of Hepatitis B vaccine at birth

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Hepatitis B in Association with the Mission of Mercy Dental Clinic



- All children and adolescents younger than 19 years of age who have not been vaccinated
- People whose sex partners have Hepatitis B
- Sexually active persons who are not in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship.
- Persons seeking evaluation or treatment for a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sexual contact with other men
- People who share needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- People who have close household contact with someone infected with the Hepatitis B virus
- Healthcare and public safety workers at risk for exposure to blood or blood-contaminated body fluids on the job
- People with end-stage renal disease, including predialysis, hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, and home dialysis patients
- Residents and staff of facilities for developmentally disabled persons
- Travelers to regions with moderate or high rates of Hepatitis B
- People with chronic liver disease
- People with HIV infection
- Anyone who wishes to be protected from Hepatitis B virus infection

21. Where can I go for more information?

You can talk to your local health department or provider. In the state of West Virginia, you can also call our hotline: 1-800-642-8244.

These websites have good information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis>

<http://www.hepfi.org>