

## **Information for women who are Hepatitis B positive**

### **Your blood tests have shown that you are Hepatitis B positive – what does this mean?**

This result shows that you have been exposed to the Hepatitis B virus at some time in your life.  
It is estimated that approximately 1 in 1000 people carry the virus in the UK.

### **What is Hepatitis B infection?**

A virus which can affect the liver causing infection and inflammation.

### **How is Hepatitis B infection transmitted?**

- By having unprotected penetrative sex with an infected person.
- By sharing drug-injecting equipment if you are a drug user.
- By accidentally receiving a needlestick injury from a needle used by or on an infected person.
- By the use of infected equipment during tattooing, acupuncture or dental treatment.
- From an infected mother to her baby at or around delivery or through breast feeding.
- By using the toothbrush or razor of an infected person.

### **How would a person know if you had Hepatitis B infection?**

Sometimes a person can be infected and not know (but still infectious to others). Usually with a bad attack a person feels generally unwell, tired and loses their appetite. The skin and eyes become yellow (jaundiced) and the skin may be very itchy. They may have tummy pain and also notice that their urine has become very dark and bowel movements are pale and clay coloured. These are due to the effects of the virus on the liver, which is unable to work properly. Symptoms may appear gradually, from 6 weeks to up to 6 months after infection, and can last for several weeks or months.

### **How long does the infection last?**

If you are infected you can infect others 6 weeks before you notice any symptoms and for an unknown time after your symptoms appear. Recovery usually takes place within 6 months. More than 95% of people who have symptoms recover from Hepatitis B and are no longer infectious. A small number may become carriers. This is more likely if the person has no symptoms after being infected. Some carriers later develop liver disease such as cirrhosis or liver cancer. Hepatitis B is 100 times more infectious than HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus).

## **How is it diagnosed?**

It is diagnosed by a blood test. The test will tell you if you have got Hepatitis B at the time of testing.

It will also tell you:

- Whether you have been infected in the past and now have immunity.
- Whether you are a carrier or not and if you are at risk of infecting others.
- Whether you have responded to vaccination and now have immunity.

## **What will happen to your baby if you have Hepatitis B?**

If there is a risk that the virus will be passed to your baby then the baby will be given vaccination treatment commencing soon after birth. If the risk is considered to be high, then your baby will receive further treatment within 24 hours of birth as well as beginning the vaccination programme. The medication given helps to prevent the baby from becoming a carrier and makes them immune to the virus. The full vaccination programme must be completed.

The vaccination programme consists of 4 injections:

- At birth
- One (1) month later
- Two (2) months later
- Twelve (12) months later

Followed by a blood test.

Having this vaccination course will not be the standard immunisations your baby is offered. These can be discussed with your health visitor and/or family doctor.

Your partner and any children you have will also need to be tested for Hepatitis B virus and if negative, vaccinated.

## **How can you prevent passing on Hepatitis B?**

- Cuts and grazes should be washed clean of blood and covered with a waterproof dressing.
- Clean up any spilled blood with either bleach or hot soapy water and detergent.
- Do not have unprotected sex with your partner unless they have been vaccinated.
- Always tell any healthcare worker who gives you any treatment that you have the virus.
- Do not donate blood or carry an organ donor card.
- Do not share razors, tooth brushes, scissors towels or face cloths.

- Do not share any of your equipment if you are an injecting drug user.

### **Health Advice**

When you are Hepatitis B positive it is advised to avoid alcohol and only take drugs prescribed by your GP as these can put further strain on the way your liver works.

### **Follow up for women who are Hepatitis B carriers**

A referral will be made for you to see a specialist with expertise in liver disease.

Your GP (family doctor), health visitor and community midwife will be informed of the positive Hepatitis B result so that he/she is able to support you and your family.

On discharge from hospital following your delivery, your GP and health visitor will receive details of your baby's vaccination programme via letter.

### **How will Hepatitis B affect my pregnancy and delivery?**

The fact that you are Hepatitis B will not affect your pregnancy in any way, or in the way in which your baby is delivered. All staff wear protective clothing for procedures in which there is risk of splashing or contamination. They do this for all deliveries, you will not be singled out in any way, and therefore your care will not be affected.

You can be given an appointment to see a specialist midwife who can answer many of your questions. If you wish to talk to one of our paediatric doctors from the special care unit or to your consultant again please ask the midwife to arrange an appointment for you.

### **Breast feeding**

Hepatitis B can be passed to your baby via breast milk. Only if your baby is vaccinated following birth can you breast feed.

For further information:

Specialist Midwife  
Liverpool Womens Hospital NHS Trust  
0151 708 9988 ext. 4367

British Liver Trust  
Telephone: 0142 5463080

You may find the following web sites useful for further information

<http://www.womens-health.co.uk/hcv.htm>

[www.britishlivertrust.org.uk](http://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk)

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