



NHS Infectious Diseases in Pregnancy Screening Programme



Hepatitis B: what does my positive screening result mean?

What does my positive screening result mean?

Your recent blood test shows that you have screened positive for hepatitis B.

Most people with the hepatitis B virus remain well, with no symptoms, but they can still pass the virus to others. Some people will develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver which over time can cause serious health problems. In rare cases, this can lead to liver cancer.

How did I become infected?

Hepatitis B virus is carried in the blood and is very infectious. The main ways it can be passed to others are:

- from person to person during unprotected sex
- from a mother to her baby during pregnancy or birth
- by sharing needles and/or any drug injecting equipment or non-sterile equipment used for dental, medical procedures, tattooing or body piercing
- from sharing toothbrushes or razors

Hepatitis B (HBV) is a viral infection carried in the blood that affects the liver by causing inflammation. The majority of people infected will clear the virus naturally but some will have long-term (chronic) hepatitis B infection.

Hepatitis B is not spread by everyday contact such as coughing or kissing, or sharing bathrooms, toilets, food, cups and towels.

Can I be treated?

Currently, there is no cure for hepatitis B. Blood tests taken in pregnancy will show the amount of virus present in your blood (viral load testing). If your viral load is very high you may be offered medication to reduce the level of virus.

How can I protect my baby?

Babies born to mothers with hepatitis B are at risk of becoming infected.

A course of hepatitis B vaccinations is **strongly** recommended as it reduces the chances of your baby becoming infected and offers them protection against hepatitis B infection.

The vaccine is extremely effective and has an excellent safety record. Your baby will need a vaccination:

- within 24 hours of birth – they may also need an injection of antibodies (immunoglobulin)
- at 4 weeks of age

Your baby will receive a hepatitis B containing vaccine at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age as part of the routine childhood immunisation schedule.

Your baby will need a final vaccination at 12 months with an additional blood test to check the vaccinations have been successful and infection has been avoided. It is very important they have all 6 recommended doses of the vaccine at the correct times to protect their health.

Having hepatitis B should not affect your pregnancy care and overall experience. It does not mean you will need a caesarean section and you will still be able to breastfeed safely.

What happens next?

1. A specialist midwife will talk to you about your result and answer any questions you and your partner have.
2. An appointment will be made with a hepatitis specialist who will perform additional investigations/blood tests to check the status of infection and plan your care.
3. Your team will also discuss any testing or treatment required for your partner and any children or family members.

It is important that you attend all your appointments during pregnancy to keep you fit and well and reduce the risk of your baby becoming infected.

Who needs to know I have hepatitis B?

It is important that everyone involved in your care is made aware of your result. This will enable them to ensure that you and your baby receive safe and effective treatment and care.

Confidentiality

Your information will not be shared with anyone other than the professionals involved in your care, such as your family doctor and midwife, without your permission.

The NHS collects information about you and your baby so as to monitor health trends and improve services and care. The NHS has strict confidentiality and data security procedures in place to ensure that personal information is not given to unauthorised persons.

Where can I get more information?

You can find out more about hepatitis B from:

- NHS Choices www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis
- Patient.co.uk www.patient.co.uk/health/hepatitis-b-leaflet
- Hepatitis B Foundation UK www.hepb.org.uk
- British Liver Trust www.britishlivertrust.org.uk

If you have any other questions or concerns talk to your doctor or midwife or health visitor.

Local contact:

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