



## EASTERN REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

Údarás Réigiúnda Sláinte an Oirthir

### Hepatitis B

#### Information Leaflet for the Public

#### What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. Anyone can get hepatitis B, but those at greater risk include drug users, health care workers, men who have sex with men, persons in institutions for intellectual disability, haemodialysis patients, household contacts of infected persons and infants born to mothers with hepatitis B. Symptoms of illness include fatigue, poor appetite and vomiting. Occasionally joint pains, rash, and jaundice may appear. Some people may have few or no symptoms, but in some cases severe illness can develop and even death.

#### How is infection with hepatitis B spread?

The virus is found in blood and to a lesser extent, saliva, semen and other body fluids of an infected person. It is spread when blood or body fluids from an infected person enter the body of a person who is not immune. This occurs in a variety of ways, including by direct contact with infected body fluids especially through sexual contact, contaminated healthcare equipment, sharing of needles by drug users, needle stick injury by healthcare workers and mother to baby transmission. In certain circumstances, close contact and the frequency of behavioural problems in people attending facilities for intellectually disabled increases the risk of transmission of the disease.

#### How long is a person infective with hepatitis B?

Illness may develop 2 to 6 months after exposure, usually within 2-3 months. The virus may be found before symptoms appear and may persist for several months. In some cases infected persons may become chronic carriers for life of hepatitis B.

#### How can hepatitis B be prevented?

**A safe and effective vaccine is available for those at risk.**

Household contacts, healthcare and other workers in contact with hepatitis B persons should be vaccinated with the hepatitis B vaccine.



Prevention of infection is focused on avoiding contact with blood and body fluids, i.e., wearing gloves, hand washing, never reusing needles and avoidance of injury. Those who are hepatitis B carriers should wear condoms for sex and should not share razors, toothbrushes, or any object that has been contaminated with blood.

Because Hepatitis B is a potentially serious infection, follow up of contacts in the community is advised. People with acute infectious Hepatitis B will be contacted either by their local Public Health Department or will be advised by a consultant in infectious diseases.

***This leaflet is for information only and is not meant for diagnosis or treatment. If you have concerns or think you have been exposed to Hepatitis B you should consult your Family Doctor.***

