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Yorkshire MESMAC

SEXUAL HEALTH PROJECT



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Yorkshire MESMAC Registered Charity 1040407

Hepatitis B

This resource is for Gay men, Bisexual men and men who have sex with men. It aims to provide you with information about Hepatitis B – its symptoms, treatment and prevention during sex between men.

Hepatitis B is a virus, which can cause damage to your liver. It is common among Gay men, Bisexual men and men who have sex with men.

How is the Hepatitis B virus passed on?

The virus lives in body fluids such as blood, cum and pre-cum, saliva and urine. It can be passed on through unprotected sex, sharing injecting equipment, tattooing with non-sterile equipment, and contact with contaminated blood.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Many people have no obvious symptoms. However, you may get a flu-like illness, loss of appetite, tiredness, nausea and vomiting, jaundice (yellow eyes and skin), abdominal pain, and dark urine. You can have the virus for between one and six months before showing any symptoms. After several months of illness, most people get over their symptoms and stop being infectious. However, 10% of infected adults go on to become chronic carriers, which means they carry the virus for the rest of their lives and remain infectious to others.

How can I prevent getting Hepatitis B?

There are a number of different vaccines available and you will be told by the doctor or nurse when you start your vaccinations when you will have your injections. For maximum immunity you should complete the course and have all three injections. However, having just one or two offers a degree of immunity which is better than nothing. There is also a vaccine for Hepatitis A which is usually one injection. Free Hepatitis B vaccines are available from your local GUM (sexual health) clinic and in some community settings. For details of your local GUM clinic contact Yorkshire MESMAC.

Using condoms with water based lubricant for anal sex can reduce the likelihood of transmission of Hepatitis B, if you have not been vaccinated. Oral sex can be made less risky if condoms and dental dams are used.

How is Hepatitis B treated?

Most people with Hepatitis B do not need treatment as they do not develop long-term liver damage. However, if you are infected for more than six months you may benefit from treatment. You will need to be regularly seen by a specialist in liver diseases (hepatologist) or a specialist in digestive diseases (gastroenterologist) to check whether you have liver damage and whether treatment is necessary. If treatment is needed, most commonly an antiviral medication called interferon is used. Its aim is to prevent the virus from growing and causing more liver damage. The drug is given by injection three times a week for at least three months. Not everyone responds well to treatment with interferon. Some people respond well to start with, but get worse again as soon as treatment stops.

Hepatitis B for people living with HIV

If you are living with HIV you can have a Hepatitis B vaccination. However, if you have a damaged immune system the vaccination may be less successful in providing immunity. People living with HIV who become infected with Hepatitis B are more likely to develop chronic Hepatitis.