

The Five Faces of Hepatitis

Scientists have currently identified five different hepatitis viruses. All are serious infections that can attack and damage the liver.

	Hepatitis A	Hepatitis B	Hepatitis C	Hepatitis D	Hepatitis E
How It Is Spread	By drinking water or eating food contaminated with fecal material that contains the virus.	Exposure to infected blood, unprotected sex with an infected person, sharing contaminated needles, and travel to countries with a high rate of infection. Infected mothers also may infect newborns.	Direct contact with human blood, which can occur from being pricked accidentally by a contaminated needle, injecting illegal drugs, and sharing razors or toothbrushes with an infected person.	Contact with infected blood. Requires the hepatitis B virus to replicate, so it infects either at the same time as hepatitis B or those who already have hepatitis B.	Water contaminated with fecal material, especially in developing countries, and contaminated uncooked shellfish, fruits and vegetables.
Symptoms	Flu-like symptoms such as fatigue, nausea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Liver tests may be elevated.	Loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, fever, fatigue, abdominal pain, dark urine, or jaundice. No symptoms in some people.	More than half have no symptoms. Others have appetite loss, fatigue, nausea, fever, dark-yellow urine, and jaundice. Liver tests may be elevated.	Same as for hepatitis B but typically more severe: appetite loss, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain.	Abdominal pain, dark urine, fever, jaundice, nausea, and vomiting.
Treatment	Bed rest and avoidance of intimate contact. Can last between three weeks and six months. Two approved vaccines: immune globulin for short-term protection and for patients already exposed, and hepatitis A vaccine for long-term protection.	Interferon alpha. A vaccine—recommended for newborns, infants, and teenagers—provides immunity for at least five years.	Interferon or a combination of interferon and the drug ribavirin. No vaccine.	Interferon alpha for hepatitis B may have some effect.	Bed rest. No drug treatment or vaccine.