

Information for pregnant women who are hepatitis B positive

This leaflet is for you if you are pregnant and have had a test for hepatitis B and the result suggests you have the hepatitis B virus. This means you have been infected with hepatitis B in the past and are now a carrier of the virus.

We need to double-check this result by taking another blood sample from you. It is very unlikely that this result will be any different. At the same time, we would like to do another blood test, which will give us more information about any treatment you and your baby may need. We will send the results of this test to the specialist before you have an appointment.

This leaflet gives information about:

- being hepatitis B positive; and
- ways in which you can stop your baby from becoming infected with the virus.

What does my blood test result mean?

Your blood test result means that you have caught the hepatitis B virus at some time in your life. It is unlikely that your baby will catch the virus while you are pregnant, but there is a high chance that you could pass the virus to your baby during the birth.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus which attacks the liver. Many people who carry hepatitis B have no symptoms and may not know they have the virus until they have a screening test.

Some people who catch this virus never get rid of it from their body. The virus stays in their body even though they seem well. Even if you do not have any symptoms, you can still pass the virus to other people.

How did I catch hepatitis B?

You can only pass the virus to another person if:

- your blood comes into contact with theirs;
- you have unprotected sex with another person; or
- you pass it to your baby when you give birth.

You cannot pass the virus to other people during normal social contact, for example, sharing towels, sharing cutlery, being with friends and family, and eating meals together.

What will happen next ?

You will be offered an appointment with a specialist soon after your diagnosis. The specialist will give you advice about preventing infection in your baby and will carry out tests to see if you need any treatment yourself. Hepatitis B can affect the liver, and some people need treatment to prevent the liver from being damaged.

What treatment can my baby have?

Treatment is available to protect your baby from infection. We will ask you to give your permission for a safe and effective vaccine to be given to your baby that can protect him or her from carrying the virus and developing liver problems. If your blood test result shows that the hepatitis B virus you have is highly infectious, we will offer your baby another injection at the same time to give extra protection against the virus.

Without treatment it is very likely that you will pass the virus to your baby during the birth. If your baby does not receive treatment there is a 9 out of 10 chance (90%) that your baby will catch the virus, will carry hepatitis B for life and be at risk of developing severe problems such as liver damage in later life.

All babies are offered protection against hepatitis B as part of the routine infant vaccinations. Babies whose mothers are hepatitis B positive will need six vaccinations to get the best protection.

- The first vaccination should be given within 24 hours of the birth.

Your baby will need five more vaccinations. These are given when your baby is:

- one month old;
- two months old; three months old; four months old (as part of the routine infant vaccinations); and
- 12 to 13 months old.

It is very important that your baby receives the full course of the vaccinations, or they will not get the best possible protection.

You should be invited to bring your baby in for these vaccinations. If this does not happen, you should ask your doctor or health visitor about the vaccinations your baby needs.

After your baby has completed the course of vaccinations the doctor will ask for him or her **to have a blood test**. This is to make sure that the injections were successful and your baby is free from the infection.

How can I stay healthy with hepatitis B?

The following simple things can help you stay healthy.

- Do not drink alcohol – it can damage your liver.
- Tell your doctor that you are a hepatitis B carrier and ask about any treatment or tests that might help.
- Ask a doctor before you take any medicine, even herbal medicines or medicines that can be bought without a prescription.
- Never inject drugs. This can give you two other types of hepatitis infection (hepatitis C and D) which can also damage your liver. Get help from a drug-treatment centre if you need help to stop using drugs.

Who needs to know that I am hepatitis B positive?

To give you and your baby the best care, we will need to involve other specialists. Your midwife will ask you if they can share information about you with these specialists before the specialists become involved with your care.

As this virus can be passed through unprotected sex, we would advise that your partner is screened for hepatitis B as they may also need vaccinating against the virus. Your partner can go to their GP surgery or sexual-health clinic and ask for a hepatitis B test.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information about hepatitis B and antenatal tests from the hospital midwife who specialises in antenatal screening or from the hospital doctor (the obstetrician).

You can also contact the British Liver Trust at:

The British Liver Trust

Phone: 0800 6527330 (10am to 2:45pm Monday to Friday)

Website: www.britishlivertrust.org.uk

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www.antenatalscreening.wales.nhs.uk

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