



**Big Brothers Big Sisters**  
of the Fraser Valley

**Chapter 1:  
Healthy  
Bodies**

# HEPATITIS

## INTERVIEW WITH A VIRUS

**KIDS HELP PHONE:**

24 hour confidential phone or  
online counselling for youth

1-800-668-6868

[www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

**BC Ministry of Health**

[www.gov.bc.ca/health](http://www.gov.bc.ca/health)

**Options for Sexual Health**

**1-800-SEX-SENSE**

[www.optionsforsexualhealth.org](http://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org)

**OPT Abbotsford Clinic:**

(604) 855-7111

**OPT Maple Ridge:**

(604) 463-6268

**OPT Mission**

(604) 814-55022

**Abbotsford Health Unit**

*Offers STD Testing & Treatment*

604-864-3400

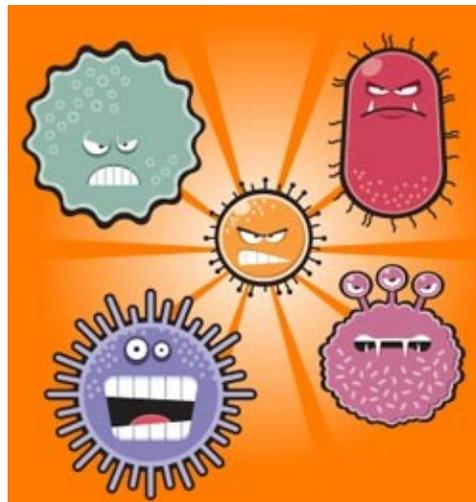
**PLANETAHEAD.CA**

*A fun interactive site on sexual  
health!*

**STD Resource**

*BC's Information Resource for  
STD's/STI's*

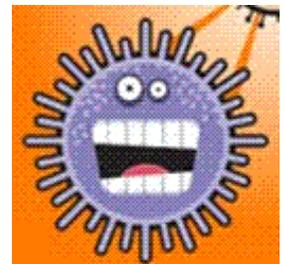
[www.stdresource.com](http://www.stdresource.com)



Welcome Friend! You likely picked up this article hoping to learn more about the Hepatitis Virus. Well, surprise surprise. There are actually five of us! Our names are A, B, C, D, and E. Some of us are nicer than others. Don't worry if you confuse us - even our own mother can't always tell us apart! If you're hoping to meet one of us, we can offer some tips to make that encounter more likely. Likewise, if you're hoping not to cross our path (don't worry, our feelings won't be hurt, we can be nasty guys) we will offer you some secrets to stay safe and disease-free! Hepatitis is a disease of the liver that causes inflammation (swelling). This is a big deal, because the liver has several important jobs, including breaking down harmful substances, regulating chemical levels of the blood, and producing bile which helps carry away waste and break down fats in the small intestine. We are the viruses (a virus is a type of germ) that can cause Hepatitis. You've likely already been vaccinated to protect your body against a few of us. Fair enough. We were quite excited to be asked for this interview to give our side of the story. I mean, we're just trying to make a living same as anyone else out there! Hopefully after you read our stories you will be able to tell the difference between us, and you'll also understand us a bit better. Because that's all any of us want, right? To be understood?

**LET'S GET  
THINGS  
STARTED!**

MY NAME IS **HEP  
A. YOU CAN  
CALL ME ARNOLD.**  
WHAT DO YOU  
WANT TO KNOW  
ABOUT ME? LET'S  
START WITH THE BASICS.



**FULL NAME:** Hepatitis A Virus

**MOST COMMON HANG-OUT:**

Usually infected food or water or in feces (poop).

**INTERESTS:** I love travelling.

**SYMPTOMS:** If I infect your body, you might experience jaundice (yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes), loss of appetite, fever, darker urine, abdominal pain, fatigue (tiredness), and nausea. Most people don't even show any symptoms! I'm sneaky.

**HOW TO MEET ME:** My preferred method of travel is via feces (poop). Don't judge, it's an effective way to get around! That means if someone doesn't wash their hands after going to the bathroom or changing a baby, then they go prepare food, I can sneak from their hands into the food and infect the person that unknowingly puts me into their body! In countries where untreated sewage makes its way into the water supply, I can also sneak into a glass of drinking water or an ice cube. If you DON'T want to meet me (although I can't understand why you wouldn't) make sure you wash your hands before eating or preparing food, and never eat or drink food or water from places your parents say aren't safe.

**GOOD QUALITIES:** Most people don't know that once you are infected with me and fight me off, I'll never bother you again! See, I'm not such a bad guy!

**MY BIGGEST SECRET:** I'm scared of the Hep A Vaccine! If you're going to be travelling to parts of the world where I like to hang out, make sure you ask your doctor to vaccinate you first to keep you safe. There are vaccines available that protect against both Hep A and B at the same time.

**IF YOU MEET ME:** Well if you are feeling up to it, make sure to shake my hand and say 'Hey', not everyone gets to meet me! Be sure to visit your doctor if you think you've encountered me or any of my brothers!

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Fraser Valley:**

[www.mentoringworks.ca](http://www.mentoringworks.ca)



## Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Fraser Valley



### OKAY IT'S MY TURN! TIME TO MOVE ON!

**FULL NAME:** Hepatitis B Virus. My friends call me Barney, so you can too I guess. Whatever.

**MOST COMMON HANG-OUT:** Most infections happen when infected blood or blood products enter the bloodstream of a person who is not protected against me. I'm most often found in the young adult

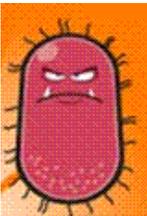
crowd and I cause about 20,000 new cases of Hep B every year in Canada.

**INTERESTS:** Tattoos and piercings.

**SYMPTOMS:** Tiredness, loss of appetite, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), or no symptoms at all! I can cause swelling in your liver that can lead to serious liver damage and even cancer. A small percentage of people will develop chronic Hep B infection with the potential for liver damage, but antivirals (a medication that can prevent the spread of a virus) can stop my progression and 90% of people make a full recovery.

**HOW TO MEET ME:** You might encounter me if you have unprotected sex, share needles, get a tattoo or piercing with unsterile equipment, get bitten by an infected person, or share personal items like razors or toothbrushes that might carry a drop of blood. I can also be passed from mother to child during birth or through breast milk. If you don't want to meet me, never share needles, always wear a condom if you have sex, and never touch the blood of an infected person.

**GOOD QUALITIES:** Hepatitis B is not spread by coughing, sneezing or sharing utensils. I am only spread through bodily fluids like blood. Many Canadian students get their Hep B shot to protect themselves against me in middle school. The vaccine is very safe. 4-6% of the Canadian population will get Hep B at some point.



**MY BIGGEST SECRET:** If you are pregnant and think you might be infected, make sure to talk to your doctor or else I might be paying a visit to your child as well!

### WHO WANTS TO LEARN 'BOUT HEP C?

**FULL NAME:** The name is Clarence, but you'll be in big trouble if you call me that to my face. My nickname is Hep C Virus (Or HCV), got it? It's not up for debate.

**MOST COMMON HANG-OUT:** I'm spread through contact with infected blood.

**SYMPTOMS:** The illness usually begins with flu-like symptoms like fatigue, fever, aches and pains, and nausea or vomiting. Urine might become dark brown and your skin and eyes might turn yellow. 15-20% of people make a full recovery, but the majority will become chronically ill. Many people will develop cirrhosis, which severely damages the liver. Of the more than 5,000 people infected each year, 70% will not show symptoms. Some people don't show symptoms until 20-30 years later! They can unknowingly infect lots of people in the meantime.

**HOW TO MEET ME:** Two-thirds of all new diagnoses are due to unsafe drug use. Never share needles or other drug equipment. Cleaning equipment with bleach doesn't always get rid of me either. You might also encounter me if you get a tattoo or piercing with an unclean needle. Only visit a tattoo parlour with a good reputation for safety and proper hygiene. Wear latex gloves if you are going to be in contact with another person's blood (like if your friend skins their knee and you help them clean it up). It's also possible to catch the virus from sharing a toothbrush or razor with an infected person if a drop of their blood gets onto it. I can last several weeks in open air.

**MY BIGGEST SECRET:** Word on the street is that I'm the meanest and baddest out of all my brothers. I can cause serious liver damage and exhaustion. I'm very dangerous so don't mess with me! There is currently no vaccine or cure for Hepatitis C, but I do respond to treatment, so see your doctor if you think you might be at risk.



### OOOH MY TURN ALREADY? HERE GOES!

**FULL NAME:** Duh, you can call me Hep D!

**MOST COMMON HANG-OUT:** In the blood! I hate being alone though. I'm a bit of a scaredy-cat.

**INTERESTS:** Hanging out with my brother.

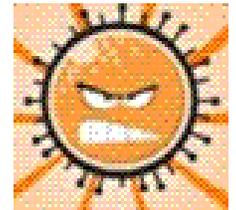
**SYMPTOMS:** Fatigue, jaundice, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, joint pain, nausea and vomiting, or dark coloured urine.

**HOW TO MEET ME:** I'm kinda scared to be out infecting bodies all by myself, so I'll only pay you a visit if my brother Hep B is already in your body. If you get both of us at the same time it is called co-infection, but if you get me after you've have Hep B for a while, it is called super-infection. About 5% of people who have both of us living in their bodies will develop a chronic illness. I usually enter the body through intravenous drug use. If you do drugs, never share needles! Since Hep B already likely damaged your liver pretty badly, I can do additional damage that might even lead to death in about 1% of people!

**GOOD QUALITIES:** The number of people who get infected with Hepatitis D is very low in Canada.

**MY BIGGEST SECRET:** There are no vaccines for Hep D. Anyone infected with Hepatitis B is at risk for Hepatitis D. If you aren't already infected with HBV, you should get the Hepatitis B vaccine! Because I'll only visit you if my brother does!

### LAST BUT NOT LEAST!



**FULL NAME:** H.E. Virus (Hepatitis E for short)

**MOST COMMON HANG-OUT:** Usually found in infected water in less developed countries. I am found in the feces of infected people and animals, and am usually transmitted through contaminated water.

**INTERESTS:** Travelling outside North America

**SYMPTOMS:** Flu-like symptoms, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, jaundice, diarrhea, abdominal pain, loss of appetite.

**HOW TO MEET ME:** You probably won't encounter me unless you travel to developing countries, especially in South Asia and North Africa. Avoid drinking water, drinks with ice, or brushing your teeth with tap water in areas where you think the water might not be clean. Also avoid uncooked shellfish or fruits and veggies washed in the water. Wash your hands with soap and hot water after going to the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before preparing or eating food. I most often affect 15-40 year olds. Possibly because they are the ones that travel the most?!

**GOOD QUALITIES:** I don't hang around Canada or the USA much so you'll likely only meet me while travelling abroad. I can cause swelling of the liver and a lot of discomfort but no long-term damage. The disease usually resolves itself in two weeks, except in pregnant women where it can cause serious medical problems.

**Little Known Fact:** Whenever a diagnosis of Hepatitis is made but can't be attributed to any of us, the person is told they have Hepatitis X. Must be a long-lost cousin!



## How do I talk to my Little about Hepatitis?

- ◆ When asked a difficult question, pause to ask yourself whether or not you have enough information to answer your Little's question, if you are comfortable discussing the subject matter, and if this is the appropriate time to respond to their question.
- ◆ If you feel knowledgeable enough to answer the question, respond to your Little. If your Little asks a question about Hepatitis, ask him or her what they already know about it to gauge an appropriate starting point for the conversation. Clear up any misperceptions (eg. that Hepatitis is only sexually-transmitted).
- ◆ If you don't know how to respond, there is nothing wrong with telling your Little that it is such an important question you want to take some time to gather your thoughts, as well as more information on the issue. Ask permission to look into it and follow up on the question the next time you meet.
- ◆ If you really do not feel comfortable discussing the issue, you could tell your Little that you do not feel knowledgeable enough, or you don't want to influence him or her with your perspective. Encourage them to speak with their parent or Doctor.
- ◆ Foster self-esteem in your Little to empower him or her to make suitable decisions when faced with critical life choices and to avoid peer pressure when it comes to unsafe sex, drug use, etc.

### MYTHS ABOUT HEPATITIS:

- Myth:** If Hepatitis was really harming my health, I would have symptoms.
- Fact:** Symptoms can be absent or mild in 80% of people, but serious liver damage can still result.
- Myth:** Only people who have a history of risky behavior should be tested.
- Fact:** 30% of diagnosed people have no clue how they contracted the disease. Anyone should be tested if they would like to be.
- Myth:** Hepatitis is not as common as HIV.
- Fact:** Hepatitis C alone affects four times more North Americans than HIV.
- Myth:** Hepatitis is transmitted through sneezing and hugging.
- Fact:** Hepatitis is not transmitted through casual contact with another person where blood is not exchanged, like sharing drinking glasses or sneezing and hugging.

### DEFINITIONS:

*Acute Hepatitis:* lasting shorter than six months. May cause flu-like symptoms and most people recover completely.

*Chronic Hepatitis:* lasting longer than six months. Usually causes no symptoms except loss of energy, so people may not know they have it until they develop serious liver problems and eventually liver failure.

## Resources

*Available from the Fraser Valley Regional Library*

### For TEENS (13-17)

- *Safe Sex 101: An Overview for Teens.* Margaret O. Hyde and Elizabeth H. Forsyth. Minneapolis: MN: Twenty-First Century Books, 2006.
- *Everything You Need to Know about Hepatitis.* Virginia Aronson. New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2000.

### For BIG BROTHERS/BIG SISTERS & PARENTS

- *Hepatitis A to G: The Facts You Need to Know About All the Forms of this Dangerous Disease.* Alan Berkman and Nicholas Bakalar. Warner Books, 2001.
- *Understanding Hepatitis.* James L. Achord. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002.
- *100 Questions and Answers about Hepatitis C: A Lahey Clinic Guide.* Stephen Fabry & R. Anand Narasimhan. Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2007.

### REMEMBER:

#### KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!

The better we understand Hepatitis, the better we are able to prevent and treat it.



### Thank you to the following members of our Panel for

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- ◇ Danielle Charde (Options for Sexual Health)
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