

Calvin College Health Services Screening for Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a serious liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Although many people exposed to the virus recover completely, chronic infections can lead to severe liver damage, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver cancer and death.

HBV is transmitted through activities that involve contact with blood or blood-derived fluids. Such activities can include unprotected sex with an HBV-infected partner; shared needles used for injection of illegal drugs; work in health-care fields (medical, dental, laboratory, or other) that entails direct exposure to human blood; receiving blood transfusions that have not been screened for HBV; or having dental, medical, or cosmetic (e.g., tattooing or body piercing) procedures with needles or other equipment that are contaminated with HBV. In addition, open skin lesions, such as those due to impetigo, scabies, or scratched insect bites, can play a role in HBV transmission if direct exposure to wound exudates from HBV-infected persons occurs.

The prevalence of chronic HBV infection is low (<2%) in the general population in Northern and Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, and Southern South America. In the United States and many other developed countries, children and adolescents are routinely vaccinated against hepatitis B. The highest incidence of disease is in younger adults, and most HBV infections are acquired through unprotected sex with HBV-infected partners or through shared needles used for injection drug use. The prevalence of chronic HBV infection is intermediate (2%-7%) in South Central and Southwest Asia, Israel, Japan, Eastern and Southern Europe, Russia, most areas surrounding the Amazon River basin, Honduras, and Guatemala. The prevalence of chronic HBV infection is high (>8%) in all socioeconomic groups in certain areas: all of Africa; Southeast Asia, including China, Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines; the Middle East, except Israel; South and Western Pacific islands; the interior Amazon River basin; and certain parts of the Caribbean (Haiti and the Dominican Republic).

The college wants to ensure the good health of all its students and requires HBV screening (a blood test) for high risk individuals. All new students who meet the high risk criteria will be asked to submit to a blood test within their first month on campus. Persons shown to have chronic HBV infection will be evaluated further and offered management, counseling, and treatment options.

See Map: <http://www2.ncid.cdc.gov/travel/yb/utills/images/map4-5.gif>

For further information:

Hepatitis B Foundation: <http://www.hepb.org>

American Liver Foundation: <http://www.liverfoundation.org/>

National Center for Infectious Diseases: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/>