

Hepatitis E virus (HEV)

Information for patients with a blood (haematology) condition or impaired immune system

This leaflet explains hepatitis E virus (HEV) infection, including how it is passed on, the main symptoms, and how and when we test for it. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the doctors or nurses caring for you.

What is hepatitis E virus?

HEV is a virus that infects the liver. It can cause infection in animals as well as in humans.

Most healthy people do not know they have HEV infection because they often do not have symptoms or may only have mild symptoms.

If you have a weakened immune system caused by cancer or its treatment or due to bone marrow failure, you are at risk of developing more serious symptoms and illness. These include your liver being unable to clear the virus, which causes a chronic infection and – in rare cases – can lead to liver failure and death.

How is HEV passed on?

In the UK, you can get HEV by eating:

- undercooked or raw pork or game
- processed pork
- undercooked shellfish.

It is very rare to get it from someone else but it is possible for it to be passed on through blood transfusion and organ transplantation. All blood products in the UK are screened for HEV which significantly reduces the risk of infection.

What are the symptoms?

They include:

- yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- dark urine
- pale poo (stools)
- tiredness
- fever
- nausea
- vomiting
- tummy (abdominal) pain
- loss of appetite.

How can I avoid getting HEV?

- Make sure that all pork, game and shellfish products you eat are well cooked. In particular, pork should be cooked to 75°C and sausages should be well cooked to 85°C and have no signs of pink inside. You can check temperatures using a meat thermometer.
- Wash your hands very well before preparing, serving and eating food.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat and shellfish.
- Always wash your hands after using the toilet.
- When travelling to countries with poor sanitation, boil all drinking water, including water for brushing your teeth, avoid eating raw or undercooked meat and shellfish, and do not have ice in your drinks.

When will I be tested for HEV?

You will have a blood test for HEV infection before you start any treatment that could weaken your immune system. If your liver function tests become abnormal during or after treatment, you will be retested for HEV infection.

How is HEV infection treated?

If your blood test shows that you are infected with HEV and your body does not clear the virus on its own, you may need to take antiviral medication to treat it.

There is no vaccine to prevent HEV

Further information

You can contact your Clinical Nurse Specialist for further advice.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS:

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: kch-tr.pals@nhs.net

You can also contact us by using our online form at www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.