

# Reactivation of hepatitis B infection

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## Information for patients

This leaflet provides an overview of hepatitis B virus, the difference between current and past infection, and the medications used to prevent reactivation. We also describe the Viral Hepatitis Service at King's College Hospital and what you can expect from your appointment. If you have any further questions, please speak to one of the doctors or nurses caring for you.

### Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your **name** and **date of birth** and check your **ID band**. If you don't have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address.

**If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check.**

Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

## What is hepatitis B virus (HBV)?

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver and has the potential to cause complications such as inflammation (hepatitis) and scar tissue formation (fibrosis).

## How did I catch the virus?

Often referred to as a blood-borne virus, hepatitis B is carried in the blood or bodily fluids of an infected individual. It may be transmitted in a number of ways, and this largely depends on your country of birth. The highest infection rates are found in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific. In these regions, the virus is usually spread from mother to child during childbirth and this is referred to as vertical transmission. In other countries, including the United Kingdom, the virus is more commonly spread through sexual contact or exposure to infected blood (needle sharing, injecting drugs etc).

The long-term outcome depends on the age that you were infected. If you were exposed to the virus in adulthood, most people can develop some immunity and clear the virus from the blood (past infection). However, if you were infected during infancy or childhood, the virus tends to persist and remain detectable (current infection).

## What do my blood tests show?

Blood tests help distinguish between current and past infection, as summarised below:

Blood test	Interpretation
HBV surface antigen (HBsAg)	Current infection
HBV DNA	Current infection
HBV core antibody (HBcAb)	Past or current infection
HBV surface antibody (HBsAb)	Past infection



Your blood tests show a positive HBV core antibody (HBcAb), positive HBV surface antibody (HBsAb), and negative HBV surface antigen (HBsAg). This tells us that you were exposed to the virus in the past and have developed protective antibodies (that is, past infection). However, it is impossible to know when you became infected with the virus or how long you were infected.

## **Why have I been referred to the Viral Hepatitis Service?**

Although you have developed some immunity, there is a risk that the virus may reactivate if you receive medications that suppress the immune system. These are known as immunosuppressants and include treatments for cancer (chemotherapy), as well as a range of other conditions (for example, psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis).

It is important that people are screened for hepatitis B prior to starting these medications as reactivation of the virus can be serious and potentially life-threatening. If you are considered to be at moderate or high risk, we recommend an antiviral treatment (called entecavir), and this should be started at least two weeks before the immunosuppression.

Entecavir is available in tablet form, administered once daily, and is generally well tolerated with few side effects. It should be continued for as long as you are taking the immunosuppressive medication, and for an additional 12 months. After stopping the entecavir, you should be monitored for a further year.

## **What happens at my appointment?**

You have been referred to the Viral Hepatitis Service and will be seen in the Liver Outpatient Department by a member of the Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) team. This should take place within a few weeks of referral.

During the appointment, we will review your medical history, and assess your risk of reactivating the virus. Tests will be carried out to check liver and kidney function, as well as measuring the level of the virus in your blood. If you require entecavir, this will be prescribed and ready to collect the same day from the outpatient pharmacy at King's College Hospital.

Occasionally, your blood tests may suggest the presence of scarring, inflammation or fat deposition within the liver. To confirm this, we will organise a liver ultrasound and/or a special scan called a Fibroscan. If any of these findings are present, we will arrange for you to be seen again in our clinic as you will require ongoing monitoring.

In most circumstances, you will only need to be reviewed once by the viral hepatitis team (although we will call six months after the appointment to check on your progress). Your referring medical team will continue with your ongoing care, organise blood tests to monitor the virus, and prescribe further courses of entecavir as required. You may be referred back to our service if your liver tests become abnormal or the viral levels increase despite medication.

## How can I get in touch with the Viral Hepatitis Service?

If you are having treatment at King's College Hospital, you are welcome to call us on **020 3299 5802** or email us on

**[kch-tr.hepatitisservice@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.hepatitisservice@nhs.net)**

Or you can ask your clinical nurse specialist (CNS) or doctor to refer you to us.

## Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-



to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

## Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

## 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. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

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

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **[kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)**

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email [kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net)**



