What about my partner?
The chance of passing hepatitis B on to people you have sex with depends on the stage of infection.

The people you have sex with and the people who live with you may be at risk of getting the infection from you and will need to be tested and offered vaccination. If you have hepatitis B, this will be explained to you by the doctor or nurse who sees you.

When can I have sex again?
This will depend on the stage of your hepatitis B infection. Your partner or any new partners should be tested and vaccinated against hepatitis B before having sex with them. This will be explained to you by the doctor or nurse who sees you.

What happens if hepatitis B is left untreated?
Some people will naturally clear the virus. For many, the infection will remain and, without treatment, the virus can lead to long-term damage to their health, for example liver disease (cirrhosis) or liver cancer.

Hepatitis B in pregnancy
Screening of pregnant women for hepatitis B is a routine part of care in pregnancy and is done during the first antenatal visit. If a pregnant woman is found to have hepatitis B, she is referred to a specialist. It is important that she receives the necessary medical care during pregnancy, to make sure that baby does not catch the infection. The baby will need to be vaccinated against hepatitis B when they are born and may need some other treatment. Your doctor or obstetrician will discuss this with you.

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A guide to Hepatitis B
What is hepatitis B?
Hepatitis B is a viral infection that infects the liver.
Hepatitis B is a major cause of serious liver disease such as cirrhosis and liver cancer, and affects millions of people worldwide.

In most people a full course of vaccination prevents infection.

How common is hepatitis B?
In Ireland, hepatitis B is not common among the general population. Most cases are found in people with multiple sexual partners, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users and people born in countries that have higher levels of hepatitis B.

How do I get hepatitis B?
Hepatitis B can be passed on through:
- Unprotected sexual contact (vaginal, anal, oral, rimming (mouth to anus contact))
- Sharing needles
- Mother to child during pregnancy or delivery
- Sharing toothbrushes, razors or towels contaminated with infected blood.

You cannot catch hepatitis B from:
- Sneezing or coughing
- Kissing or hugging
- Sharing dishes or glasses
- Breastfeeding
- Food or water.

What symptoms would I have with hepatitis B?
Many people with hepatitis B have no symptoms, many do not even realise that they are infected and most people who are infected have no symptoms for many years.

Some people may have symptoms when they first become infected, which can last for several weeks. These may include flu-like symptoms, feeling sick or vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine, pale faeces (poo) or itchy skin.

In a small number of people the initial infection can be severe and they can develop liver failure, which can lead to death. This is rare.

How can I be tested for hepatitis B?
Hepatitis B is diagnosed by a blood test.

Your doctor or nurse will ask for certain tests depending on your circumstances and explain what the results mean for you.

How can I prevent myself from getting hepatitis B?
There are vaccines that prevent infection with hepatitis B.

It can also be prevented by using condoms and not sharing needles.

Who should be vaccinated against hepatitis B?
The following people should consider vaccination:
- men who have sex with men
- people who inject drugs
- partners and everyone who lives with someone who has hepatitis B
- anyone diagnosed with an STI
- sex workers
- anyone who has paid for sex
- anyone who has been sexually assaulted.

Can hepatitis B be treated?
Yes, hepatitis B can be treated. If you are diagnosed with hepatitis B, you will need to see a doctor who specialises in the treatment and management of the infection.

There are different stages of hepatitis B infection.

Some stages need treatment and some do not need treatment but need to be checked regularly (monitored).

If you have hepatitis B, the stages of infection, treatments and check-ups will all be explained to you by the doctor or nurse who sees you.