

Testing for hepatitis B

- Blood tests are used to diagnose hepatitis B.
- Tests for hepatitis B are not part of regular blood tests - you have to ask.
- If you do not have hepatitis B, you should think about getting vaccinated.

You may feel healthy if you have hepatitis B, but it can still damage your liver. Over time this can cause *cirrhosis* (also known as scarring) on your liver and can lead to liver disease or liver cancer.¹

The only way to know if you have hepatitis B is by having a blood test.

Tests to diagnose hepatitis B

You need to give permission for your doctor to do a hepatitis B test.¹ It is not part of the routine blood tests done by your doctor, so you may need to ask for a test.

To understand the tests described below, it might help to know two medical terms: *antigen* and *antibody*.

- *antigen* is a foreign substance in the body (in this case, the hepatitis B virus)
- *antibody* is a protein made by the immune system to fight the antigen.²

This table lists the types of blood tests your doctor will do to test for hepatitis B and what it means if the result is positive:³

Test	What this shows	Meaning if positive
Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg)	Shows whether you currently have a hepatitis B infection	You currently have hepatitis B. For most people this is a chronic infection.
Hepatitis B core antibody (HBcAB or Anti-HBc)	Shows whether you have ever had hepatitis B	You have been exposed to hepatitis B, meaning you have it now or had it in the past.
Hepatitis B surface antibody (HBsAb or Anti-HBs)	Shows whether you are immune to hepatitis B	You cannot get hepatitis B again.

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If you:

- **test negative to all these tests**, you should ask your doctor about getting vaccinated
- **have ever had hepatitis B**, your family and people you live with should also get tested for hepatitis B
- **currently have hepatitis B**, you need further follow up and regular monitoring so you can get treatment if it starts to hurt your liver.

If you think you might have gotten hepatitis B recently, there are further tests that can be done work out if it is an acute infection.

Notes



- 1 ASHM. (2014). B Positive: All you wanted to know about hepatitis B. Darlinghurst, NSW: ASHM. Retrieved from <https://www.ashm.org.au/products/product/1976963310>
- 2 Merriam-Webster. (2019). Retrieved from Merriam-Webster Dictionary: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>
- 3 Hepatitis NSW. (2018, May 11). Hep B testing for adults. Retrieved from Hepatitis NSW: <https://www.hep.org.au/hep-b/hep-b-testing/>

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