

hepatitis B HIV infection

hepatitis C

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ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE TO BLOOD OR OTHER BODY FLUIDS POTENTIALLY CONTAMINATED

● Are there advantages TO GETTING TESTED?

The tests are aimed first and foremost at facilitating follow-up for the person who was exposed to your blood or other body fluid. In addition, tests can detect an infection you may be carrying without knowing it. With early detection, you can

- start treatment that can limit complications linked to the infection, slow its progression or, if you have hepatitis C, cure the infection;
- adopt safe behaviours to avoid transmitting the infection.

● If you agree to HAVE THE TESTS

Don't hesitate to ask questions about the types of tests that will be done, their significance, how the results will be used and the measures that will be taken to ensure confidentiality.

Establish right away how the results are to be given to you: you can ask to have your doctor tell you or the health institution that ordered the tests. In any case, the

results should be communicated to you in person during an appointment with a health professional, and not over the phone.

● If you decide not to HAVE THE TESTS

Your choice not to get tested must be respected. However, even in this case, do not hesitate to ask questions; you may realize that the fears influencing your decision are groundless.

Although less reliable than blood tests, certain information on your medical history or lifestyle can help guide the health professional responsible for assessing the risk related to the accidental exposure to your body fluids. Any information you provide will remain confidential.

- For more information, call Info-Santé at 8-1-1 or contact your doctor.

- WITH hepatitis B virus (HBV)
- hepatitis C virus (HCV)
- OR human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

● INFORMATION FOR THE SOURCE PERSON

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Québec

hepatitis B

HIV infection hepatitis C

Someone has been accidentally exposed to your blood or genital secretions.

● What does THIS MEAN?

An accidental exposure means that a person has inadvertently been in contact with your blood or other body fluid. Such an incident can happen when someone pricks themselves with a needle when giving you an injection or cuts themselves with an instrument used to give you care, or during a procedure that causes you to bleed; it can also happen when someone has unprotected sex with you or uses your injection equipment immediately after you do.

● What does THIS MEAN FOR THE EXPOSED PERSON?

Some viruses are transmitted through blood or genital secretions, especially hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). If you are a carrier of an infection caused by one of these viruses, a person exposed to your blood or genital secretions can contract it.

These infections can be detected with a simple blood test a few weeks after contamination.

If the risk of transmission cannot be ruled out, preventive measures known to be effective can be used. They include administration of a vaccine or antibodies in the case of hepatitis B, and antiretrovirals in the case of HIV. However, antiretrovirals can have side effects, some of which can be major, although the drugs currently on the market are better tolerated. There are no preventive treatments for hepatitis C.

Moreover, if the possibility that you are a carrier of HBV, HCV or HIV cannot be ruled out, the person who has been exposed to one of your body fluids will need blood tests periodically over a six-month period to ensure he or she has not contracted an infection. During this period, the person will also have to take measures to avoid transmitting a possible infection. These measures include taking steps to prevent pregnancy, using a condom, and refraining from giving blood, plasma, sperm, tissues or organs.

However, if it can be confirmed that you are not carrying any of these viruses, the person exposed to your blood will not have to undergo treatment or have extended medical follow-up since he or she will not be contaminated.

If there has been accidental exposure to your blood or other body fluids, it is very important to determine if they contain HBV, HCV or HIV.

● What does THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

A health professional will ask for your consent to carry out blood tests to determine whether hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV virus is present in your blood. You are free to accept or refuse to have these tests. Moreover, you are entitled to receive all the information needed to make a decision.

Like all information in your medical file, your test results will remain confidential. However, since your test results will determine the appropriate medical follow-up, the exposed person will be indirectly informed of the results.

Blood tests are the only reliable way to determine whether or not your blood contains HBV, HCV or HIV.

Hepatitis B and HIV infection are transmitted through blood or sexual contact; hepatitis C is transmitted mostly through blood. Four factors foster transmission of these infections: certain sexual practices, blood transfusions received in the past (before screening became mandatory), injection drug use, and the presence of a sexually-transmitted disease (e.g. gonorrhoea, chlamydia). A health professional may ask you questions about the above subjects and about any symptoms related to one of the three infections that you may have (e.g. jaundice, weight loss and pronounced fatigue).

Hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV infection can be asymptomatic for a long time. The fact that you have no signs or symptoms of these infections does not necessarily mean you are not infected. Questions about sexual behaviours are only used to indicate the nature of the risk and not to confirm or refute the presence of infection.

● Are there disadvantages TO GETTING TESTED?

The tests themselves simply involve taking a blood sample. However, finding out that you are carrying an infection you did not know you had may be difficult for you. Talk it over with a health professional. Together, you can assess the likelihood that one of the tests yield a positive result and what that would mean for you.