

# Hepatitis D

Hepatitis D is a viral [infectious hepatitis](#). It is a dangerous contagious disease that manifests with both acute and chronic [inflammation of liver tissue](#).

## Causes

The infection is caused by a virus of hepatitis D (HDV virus). This is quite a special virus, which can not exist individually, but only in coexistence with virus of infectious [hepatitis B](#) (HBV). Hepatitis D virus is transmitted by body fluids, i.e. during sexual intercourse or by sharing needles among intravenous drug addicts. Relatively common is also transmission from a sick pregnant woman to the fetus. It is possible to get infected by contaminated blood transfusion or by dialysis, but this is extremely rare in developed countries.

## Symptoms

The incubation period is relatively long and it may last for 1-2 months. When the patient has been infected by a co-infection of both HBV and HDV, the disease usually manifests with acute symptoms including nausea, [vomiting](#) and [anorexia](#). [Jaundice](#) may or may be not present. This acute stage is in the majority of cases followed by full recovery, only in few people the disease turns to chronic [liver inflammation](#).

The situation is worse when HDV infection occurs in patient with already ongoing viral [hepatitis B](#). In such case, the infection leads to a significant deterioration of the [liver inflammation](#), which may relatively quickly progress into [liver cirrhosis](#) with all its complications, or it may be followed with acute [liver failure](#), which is often fatal.

## Diagnosis

Clinical symptoms may be suspicious, especially in patients with risky behavior (promiscuous sexual behavior, unprotected sex, intravenous drug abuse, etc.). Blood tests show elevation of [liver tests](#) marking the liver damage. Serology can confirm the diagnosis by finding specific antibodies directed against the virus in the patient's blood. Signs of [liver cirrhosis](#) and its complications can be found by abdominal [ultrasound](#).

## Prevention

The best prevention against hepatitis D is quite logically the vaccine used against [hepatitis B](#). If you can not be infected with [hepatitis B](#), you also can not be infected with hepatitis D.

## Treatment

The therapy of chronic hepatitis D equals the therapy of [hepatitis B](#). Special antivirals are used, probably the best is called pegylated interferon. Cases that have progressed into [liver cirrhosis](#) are treated symptomatically and liver transplant may be indicated in the most severe cases of [liver failure](#).

