

# Hepatitis B Reactivation and Cancer Medications

## What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused by a virus. If the virus becomes active in your body, it may increase your risk of liver damage, liver cancer, and death.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Sometimes, the virus can make people feel like they have had the flu. In serious cases, they may become jaundiced (the whites of their eyes and skin turn yellow), have swelling in their legs or stomach-area, and be confused. This is called **acute hepatitis**. Most people recover from this condition.

Many people with hepatitis B do not have symptoms or have never had symptoms. Sometimes, the virus does not clear from their body and becomes “chronic”. Other times, the virus may have been passed down from their mother during childbirth. They may not know they have the infection and may carry the virus in their liver for many years. This is called **chronic hepatitis**.

## How do cancer medications affect people with hepatitis B?

For people who have chronic hepatitis, cancer medications may cause the virus to reactivate. This means the virus starts to multiply quickly, which damages the liver.

## How do I know if I have hepatitis B?

A blood test will tell your care team if you have hepatitis B, you have had it in the past, or if you are a carrier of hepatitis B virus.

All people being treated for blood cancers (for example, lymphoma, myeloma, or leukemia) will be tested for hepatitis B before their first or second cycle of treatment. Even if you have been vaccinated against hepatitis B, your care team will still order the blood test.

## What happens if my blood test shows I have hepatitis B?

If you have hepatitis B, including chronic hepatitis B or if you are a carrier of hepatitis B, your care team may prescribe medication to stop the virus from reactivating. This is called **antiviral prophylaxis**. You will take the medication during your cancer treatment and for up to 18 months after your cancer treatment ends. Your care team will talk to you about possible side effects of the medication.

Your care team may order regular blood tests to monitor your hepatitis and your liver. They may also refer you to a liver specialist. **If you have questions about hepatitis B, talk to your care team.**