HEPATITIS 'B' IS A SERIOUS DISEASE OF THE LIVER CAUSED BY THE VIRUS "H.B.V." (HEPATITIS 'B' VIRUS). IT IS ON THE INCREASE IN BRITAIN, HOWEVER THIS IS A CAUSE FOR CONCERN NOT PANIC.

W - **WHAT IS HEPATITIS 'B'**

H - **HOW HEPATITIS 'B' IS SPREAD**

A - **ADMISSION TO HOSPITAL**

T - **TREATMENT**

WHAT IS HEPATITIS 'B'

HEPATITIS 'B' is a virus found in virtually all body secretions and excretions of infected people. The onset of the disease is gradual. Symptoms are usually flu-like and include fatigue, loss of appetite, mild fever, aching muscles and joints, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, changed senses of taste and smell and tenderness in the upper abdomen. Some people may go on to develop jaundice, which is denoted by yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes, itching skin, darkened urine and light coloured faeces.

The disease has a long incubation period usually 2-3 months.

Many people are infectious but have no symptoms. As many as half of all people with Hepatitis 'B' may have no symptoms.

HOW HEPATITIS 'B' IS SPREAD

The disease may be spread through contamination of wounds/lacerations or by exposure of mucous membranes to infective blood.

Some examples of how the virus may be transmitted are as follows: -

a) Sharing infected personal care items e.g. razors, toothbrushes.

b) Individuals undergoing tattooing, acupuncture or ear piercing, due to inadequate sterilisation of needles used for these techniques. The risks have probably decreased during the last few years in Britain as the hygienic precautions taken by the performers of these techniques, have improved.

c) From an infected mother to her child during childbirth or breast-feeding.

d) Through infected blood or blood products (this risk is very low because all blood and blood products are now fully tested).

e) Sharing infected needles to inject drugs by drug addicts. As these persons are already debilitated, they may also have an impaired immunity with an increased risk of becoming a persistent carrier of the Hepatitis 'B' virus.

f) Hepatitis 'B' virus can be spread by anal or vaginal intercourse.

The virus is **NOT** passed through casual contact, or through the air **therefore** it cannot be transmitted by shaking hands, breathing, coughing, sneezing or using the same toilet seat.

ADMISSION TO HOSPITAL

On admission to hospital you maybe admitted to a side-room in order to prevent the spread of infection.

An infected person can infect others for about 4-6 weeks **before** symptoms appear and for an unknown period of time afterwards.

TREATMENT

Medication is not usually indicated, however, following consultation with the medical staff your sexual partner maybe offered vaccination.

REMEMBER

THE VIRUS IS **NOT** PASSED THROUGH CASUAL CONTACT OR THROUGH THE AIR THEREFORE IT CANNOT BE TRANSMITTED BY SHAKING HANDS, BREATHING, COUGHING, SNEEZING OR USING THE SAME TOILET SEAT.
BECAUSE OF THE UNKNOWN PERIOD OF INFECTIVITY IT IS **IMPORTANT** THAT YOU INFORM YOUR DENTIST, G.P. OR HOSPITAL MEDICAL STAFF OF YOUR INFECTION IF OR WHEN ANY TREATMENT IS REQUIRED.

WHAT YOU NEED

HEPATITIS B

TO KNOW ABOUT

CONTROL OF INFECTION

QUALITY CARE

PREPARED BY THE
INFECTION CONTROL DEPARTMENT
CITY HOSPITALS SUNDERLAND &
PRIORITY HEALTHCARE WEARSIDE
NHS TRUSTS