HEPATITIS B Fact Sheet

CAUSATIVE AGENT: Hepatitis B is caused by a virus and spread through blood, other body fluids and needles.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: In about one third of all cases the illness causes no symptoms. Another third have flu-like symptoms: fever, fatigue, muscle or joint pain, appetite loss, nausea and vomiting. About one-quarter of the cases have jaundice, a yellowing of the skin and eyes that indicates liver damage. Laboratory blood tests confirm the diagnosis. In the United States, there are about one million carriers who have no symptoms but can pass on the infection and an estimated 200,000 new cases a year.

INCUBATION PERIOD: 45 to 160 days, commonly 60 to 90 days.

PERIOD OF COMMUNICABILITY: Blood of exposed people may be infectious for many weeks before any symptoms appear. Up to ten percent of hepatitis B victims become chronic carriers, often without knowing it. Carriers, especially those infected as newborns, are at increased risk of developing cirrhosis and liver cancer. A "carrier" is a person who is not ill but still has particles of the virus in the blood.

METHOD OF TRANSMISSION: An infected person can transmit Hepatitis B as long as the virus remains in the blood. Hepatitis B is transmitted by:

1. Sexual activity involving semen, blood or vaginal secretions.
2. Sharing unsterile instruments used to penetrate the skin such as those used for tattooing, ear piercing, and razors.
3. Sharing intravenous (IV) needles and/or syringes with someone who is infected.
4. Direct contact of infected blood with mucous membranes of eyes and mouth.
5. Direct contact of infected blood with broken skin (e.g. cuts).
6. Accidental needle sticks with needles containing blood from a virus carrier.
7. Sharing toothbrushes and razors with an infected person.
8. Being born to an infected mother.

PREVENTION: A vaccine is available in a 2-3 dose series to prevent infection. In case of exposure, hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) may be used for temporary protection.

SCHOOL CONTROL POLICY: A sick child remains home until a health care provider authorizes return to school. "Carriers" may attend school. Universal precautions are followed in the classroom for all students.

For more information contact: your health care provider, your School Nurse, the Marin County Health Department or http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/b/