

# Lifelines



from the National Cancer Institute

## What Asian Americans Should Know About Liver Cancer and Hepatitis B

*By the National Cancer Institute*

Liver cancer is the fifth most common cancer among men and the seventh most common cancer among women worldwide. It is the third leading cause of cancer death globally. Liver cancer is less common in the United States, where it is estimated that, in 2012, there will be 28,720 new cases and 20,550 deaths from this disease. However, both the number of new cases and the number of people dying from liver cancer are increasing in this country. The number of new cases of liver cancer in the United States is highest among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

Certain types of hepatitis virus, including hepatitis B virus (also known as HBV or HepB), are a major cause of liver disease and liver cancer. Chronic, or long-term, infection with HBV can cause hepatitis, an inflammation (swelling) of the liver. Over time, the damage to the liver can lead to liver cancer. Hepatitis B spreads through contact with blood or other body fluids from a person who is infected with the virus. It can also spread from an infected mother to her infant at birth.

Asian Americans have a higher risk for being infected with hepatitis B than people of other racial/ethnic groups in the United States. Approximately 1 in 12 Asian Americans is living with a chronic hepatitis B infection. But too few Asian Americans know about hepatitis B, and many are not aware that they may be infected with the virus.

There are several things you can do to protect yourself and others from hepatitis B infection. You can get a blood test from your health care provider to see if you are infected. If your blood test comes back positive, your health care provider may conduct further tests and may recommend treatment. There are no cures for hepatitis B; however, treatment is available to reduce the inflammation and slow liver damage.

Hepatitis B infection is preventable with a vaccine. The vaccine is given in three shots over 6 months, and you must get all three shots to be fully protected. If your hepatitis B virus blood test comes back negative, showing that you are not infected, then it is a good idea to get vaccinated. The vaccine is safe for people of all ages, including pregnant women and infants. In fact, the vaccine is now given routinely to infants in the United States and is recommended for anyone who is at risk of becoming infected. Pregnant women should also get vaccinated. If you are pregnant and have hepatitis B, it is very important to let your health care providers know so they

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can provide the vaccine and immune globulin (antibodies) to your baby immediately after birth to greatly reduce the chance of infection.

To learn more about liver cancer, visit the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Web site at [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov) (search term: liver) or call 1-800-4-CANCER (that's 1-800-422-6237). NCI has a variety of information on liver cancer risk, prevention, screening, treatment, clinical trials and a host of other topics.

*NCI leads the National Cancer Program and the NIH effort to dramatically reduce the burden of cancer and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families, through research into prevention and cancer biology, the development of new interventions, and the training and mentoring of new researchers. For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI Web site at [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov) (or [m.cancer.gov](http://m.cancer.gov) from a mobile phone) or call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237). More articles and videos in the culturally relevant Lifelines series are available at [www.cancer.gov/lifelines](http://www.cancer.gov/lifelines).*