What is hepatitis B?
Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus.

How do I get hepatitis B?
You can get hepatitis B from contact with blood, semen, vaginal fluid and/or saliva of an infected person. This happens by:
• having sex with an infected partner (most common)
• sharing needles, syringes or other drug related equipment (such as cookers, cotton, pipes, straws, bills, etc.)
• sharing razors, toothbrushes, manicure or pedicure equipment (such as nail scissors)
• body piercing, tattooing, acupuncture or electrolysis equipment that may not have been properly sterilized
• needle stick or sharps injury
• breast feeding or during birth, if mother is infected

Who is most at risk of getting hepatitis B?
Hepatitis B is common around the world, but most common in Asia and Africa.
High risk of getting hepatitis B if you:
• have unprotected sex with an infected person
• have unprotected sex with many partners
• already have a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
• use injection drugs and share drug equipment that is contaminated
• get a tattoo or piercing with unsterilized needles
Moderate risk of getting hepatitis B if you:
• live or travel in regions where hepatitis B is common
• are exposed to blood or body fluids

How can I tell if I have hepatitis B?
A blood test can be done to confirm hepatitis B (if you have at least one risk factor (see above) or if you:
• were born in a region where hepatitis B is common
• live or travel to regions where hepatitis B is more common
• have family history of liver disease or liver cancer
• have been in prison
• are pregnant
• have HIV
• use injection drugs
• are on kidney dialysis
• use medication that suppresses the immune system
• have chronic hepatitis C

Additional information about hepatitis B:
• Many people who become infected with hepatitis B never feel sick and recover completely
• Some people have a brief illness and may lose their appetite, feel tired and have jaundice (skin and eyes turn yellow)
• A small percentage (5%) develop chronic hepatitis, which can lead to cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver or liver cancer

Who can I talk to if I have more questions?
If you have concerns or questions, call and ask for Sexual Health, or visit the health unit website below.

Resources
Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections (2008)
Public Health Agency Canada
Canadian Liver foundation
http://www.liver.ca/hepatitis/hepatitis-b.aspx

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