

>>> IMMUNE PLATOON DISEASE DATABASE <<<

CASE FILE: JAUNDICE JACKALS ♦ REAL NAME: HEPATITIS B
KNOWN ALIASES: HBV, HEP B ♦ MICROBE TYPE: VIRUS

PROFILE

Hepatitis viruses are all liver attackers. In fact, the “Hepatitis” family name means “inflammation of the liver.” In addition to Hep B itself, there are three other similar viruses—Hep A, Hep C, and Hep D. Hep A, being the weakest of the four, doesn’t do much damage and people recover from its infection. However, Hep C is as bad as they come—launching a lifelong attack on the liver that often leaves victims needing a transplant to survive.

Hep B is known for being stubborn and brutal. It can infect a person for a lifetime. Its attack can permanently scar the liver, or cause liver cancer, liver failure, and even death. Hep B is also a sneaky one. Only a blood test can show for sure whether someone is infected or not. Some people can be infected and not know it, but they can still spread the disease.

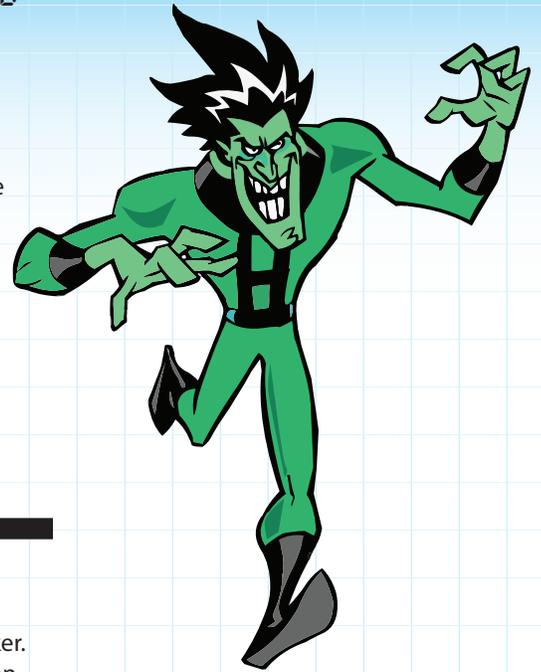
POWERS & ABILITIES

Hep B does its dirty work in one place—the liver. A liver under attack can’t do its jobs as well as it needs to—like cleaning waste from the blood and helping blood to clot. Between 15 percent and 25 percent of people with lifelong Hep B infection die from liver disease.

Many people with Hep B have no symptoms. But, some do. Hep B’s best-known trademark is jaundice—yellow eyes or skin. That is the mark of a liver under attack. The people Hep B infects may also lose their appetites, throw up, and have fevers, joint pain, or feel very exhausted.

PREFERRED METHOD OF ATTACK

Hep B is a “blood and fluids” attacker. That means that Hep B can make an entrance any time that infected body fluids (primarily blood) are shared between people (for example: during sexual contact, sharing IV drug tools, sharing razors and toothbrushes, or using dirty needles in tattooing and body piercing). Moms can also pass



Hep B to their babies when the babies are being born. It is not spread by: kissing on the cheek or lips, coughing or sneezing, casual touch like hugging or holding hands, or eating food made by someone with Hep B.

KNOWN WEAKNESSES

The Hep B vaccine is the best way to keep this disease from infecting you.

So far, Hep B has escaped all efforts to find a cure. When someone does get infected, doctors don’t usually give medicine for acute (one time) infections. For people in the clutches of Hep B long term (called chronic infections), doctors may use medications specially made to fight viruses.





AREA OF OPERATIONS

Hep B is a global attacker. In its long career, it has infected more than a billion people.

CRIMINAL RECORD

More than a million Americans have a long-term Hep B infection. Lots of them (20 percent to 30 percent) got it when they were little kids—during birth, or from living in close contact with an infected person.

At one time, we attacked Hep B by vaccinating only “high risk groups” like IV drug users and people like doctors and nurses (who could accidentally get infected by patients’ blood). But, this attack wasn’t working. Why not? Because Hep B was still nabbing people who were not in “high risk groups,” like babies. So, the scientists on Hep B’s case tried a new tactic—making sure most young people get vaccinated. Now Hep B is losing ground. In the 1980s, about 260,000 kids were infected each year. But, in 2001, only 78,000 were infected. ■

PREFERRED VICTIMS

When Hep B goes looking for victims, it has the best success infecting adults ages 20 to 49. The reason is that more people in that age range are doing things that put them at risk, like having unprotected sex and using drugs. But, anyone can be infected.

Good news, though. Hepatitis B may be losing some of its power because the vaccine is stopping infections by the thousands.

PRECAUTIONS FOR THE PUBLIC

The vaccine is your best protection. To be extra safe, avoid unprotected sex, IV drugs, tattoo or body piercing tools, and sharing personal items that might have blood on them, like razors or toothbrushes.

