



Glossary of Terms

A

Acute Viral Hepatitis: A new, sudden hepatitis infection. A person may or may not have symptoms.

Alphafetoprotein (AFP): A protein made by fetal liver cells and sometimes by liver cancer cells. In hepatitis, the AFP level is a marker for liver cancer. AFP is not a perfect test for liver cancer- some without cancer have high AFP, some with cancer have normal AFP. If doctors suspects cancer, they will conduct additional tests to confirm the diagnosis.

ALT (Alanine Aminotransferase): One of several liver enzymes measured during blood tests. Elevated (high) ALT level (particularly if the level is repeatedly high) suggests that the liver may be inflamed.

Alopecia: Thinning or loss of hair.

Anorexia: Decreased appetite or aversion to food.

Antibody: A protein produced by the immune system in response to viruses, bacteria, and other foreign substances. Antibodies help your body recognize infections and fight them. Vaccines work by helping the body produce antibodies to protect against infections. Antibodies circulate in the blood and their presence can indicate a current or past infection.

Antigen: A substance that the body recognizes as foreign- or something it should destroy. The body makes antibodies that recognize these antigens.

Anti-inflammatory: Counteracting or suppressing inflammation.

Antiviral: A substance that fights viruses.

Ascites: An abnormal accumulation of fluid in the abdomen. Ascites can result from liver failure, cirrhosis and liver cancer. This condition requires medical attention.

AST (Aspartate Aminotransferase): An enzyme produced by organs usually in response to inflammation or damage. Elevated (high) AST levels may indicate liver damage or damage to other organs (A heart attack, for example, will increase the level of AST in the blood).

Asymptomatic: Means “without symptoms”. Many people with hepatitis are asymptomatic.

B

Bile: A yellow-green fluid that made by the liver to help digest fat. Bile contains cholesterol, bile salts, and the pigment bilirubin.

C

Chronic Viral Hepatitis: A hepatitis infection lasting more than 6 months.

Chronic Carrier: A person with a long-term infection. A chronic viral hepatitis carrier can transmit hepatitis virus to others.

Cirrhosis: A liver condition characterized by scarring of the liver. Inflammation in the liver may lead to scarring. Scarring can make it difficult for the liver to function. Cirrhosis is a serious medical condition; it can lead to liver failure, liver cancer, and death.

Clinical Trials: Carefully controlled studies conducted in humans who volunteer to test the effectiveness and safety of new drugs, medical products or techniques. All prescription

drugs in the United States undergo and succeed in three phases of clinical trials before they can be approved for general use.

Compensated liver disease: Liver disease that is advanced or serious, but the liver still functions.

E

Encephalopathy: Change in brain function. Symptoms may include loss of memory, personality change, and difficulty concentrating.

Enzymes: A protein that help a chemical reaction take place. Your liver produces many enzymes such as ALT and AST.

F

False-positive: Test result that is positive when it should not be. For example, a test says hepatitis virus is present when it is not. Certain tests have higher false-positive rates than others.

Fatigue: Feeling of being very tired or lacking energy.

Fibrosis: Scarring of the liver.

G

Gastroenterology/Gastroenterologist: The field of medicine and the name for the type of medical specialist that focuses on the function and disorders of the Gastrointestinal (or GI) system, which includes the esophagus, stomach, pancreas, intestines, and liver.

Genotype: A pattern of genetic information that is present in related organisms. Hepatitis viruses vary by type (A, B, C, etc.) and each type has a number of genotypes (1, 2, 3, 4). Doctors may determine the genotype to help decide the best treatment.

H

Hepatitis: A general term for inflammation of the liver. Many things can lead to inflammation in the liver including viruses, bacterial infections, trauma, medications, and alcohol. Viral hepatitis is inflammation caused by a hepatitis virus.

Hepatitis B Surface Antigen (HbsAg): An antigen on the hepatitis B virus. Doctors look for this antigen to see if the hepatitis B virus is present in the blood. If the test for the HbsAG is positive, a person has hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B Surface Antibody (HbsAb or anti-HBs): The antibody formed in response to the surface antigen of the hepatitis B virus. The body produces this antibody in response to hepatitis B vaccine or actual hepatitis B infection. If this test is positive, the immune system successfully developed protection against the hepatitis B virus.

Hepatitis B Core Antibody (HbcAb or anti-HBc): An antibody produced in response to a part of the hepatitis B virus. Blood banks use this test to screen blood donations. A positive test indicates exposure to the hepatitis B virus. This antibody does not protect against future HBV infection.

Hepatitis B Immune Globulin (HBIG): A medication given after a person is exposed to blood or bodily fluids that might be infected with hepatitis B virus. It helps stop infection before it takes hold.

Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC): A type of liver cancer. It is a malignant tumor of the liver.

Hepatocyte: A liver cell.

Hepatology/ Hepatologist: The field of medicine (and type of doctor) focusing on diseases of the liver. It is a sub-specialty within gastroenterology (GI).

Histology: The field of medicine that studies tissue under the microscope to look for evidence of damage or disease.

I

Illicit drug: (See recreational drug)

Immune System: The body's defense system against foreign substances such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasites, and malignant cells.

Immunocompromised: A situation where the immune system is weakened or not functioning normally because of illness or a drug or chemical.

Immunology: The field of medicine that studies the immune system, including allergic reactions.

Infection: The results of the presence of harmful microorganisms in the body. Infections can be acute (new) or chronic (persistent).

Inflammation: Redness, warmth, swelling, and/or pain that results when the immune system responds to infection, irritation, or other injury.

Interferon: A protein produced by the body to protect against infection. Many different cells produce interferon, usually at low levels. Interferon is also produced in the laboratory. Interferon is used to treat infections like hepatitis and conditions like multiple sclerosis.

Investigational Drug: A new drug that is undergoing clinical trials to prove its efficacy and safety (see clinical trials).

J

Jaundice: A condition characterized by yellowness of the skin and eyes and darkening of the urine. Many illnesses and disorders can lead to jaundice including hepatitis.

L

Liver: One of the largest organs in the body. The liver has many functions (over 500) including the production of proteins, cholesterol and hormones, bile and blood clotting factors. It aids in digestion of food, stores sugar, and breaks down fats. It also breaks down alcohol and other toxins.

Liver Biopsy: The removal of a small piece of tissue from the liver using a special needle. The tissue is examined under a microscope to look for the presence of inflammation or liver damage.

Liver Function Tests (LFTs): A group of blood tests used to assess the functioning of the liver. Doctors use these tests to look for or monitor liver diseases. See ALT and AST.

Lymphocyte: A type of white blood cell that plays a role in defending the body against disease.

M

Monotherapy: Therapy with one drug or agent.

Mutation: A change in the genetic makeup of an organism. Hepatitis viruses often mutate slightly which makes them difficult to treat and to design vaccines to prevent infection.

N

Needlestick: An accidental puncture of the skin while handling hypodermic needles, usually in the healthcare setting.

Neutropenia: An abnormal decrease in the number of neutrophils, types of white blood cell.

Non-Responders: Patients who do not respond to therapy or a vaccine within a specified time-frame.

P

Patient Compliance: Level to which a patient follows the instructions of their physician. Compliance with hepatitis treatment is essential for best results.

PCR (polymerase chain reaction): A method of detecting DNA or RNA from tissues or body fluids. PCR is used to determine if hepatitis B or hepatitis C virus is in the blood.

Pegylated/pegalation: The attachment of a molecule of polyethylene glycol (PEG) to another substance. PEG was added to interferon to make it last longer in the body so that fewer injections are needed.

Percutaneous: Absorption (or passing) of substances into the body through the skin.

Perinatal Transmission (also called vertical transmission): Transmission of an infectious disease from mother to newborn before or during birth

Persistent: A disease or other medical condition that returns or continues over a long time.

Platelets: Cells produced in the bone marrow that control bleeding by helping the blood to clot. Cirrhosis can cause platelets to be stuck or sequestered and affect the ability of blood to clot.

Post-Transfusion Hepatitis: Liver inflammation that occurs when the body reacts unfavorably to a blood transfusion. This is now rare in the United States due to careful blood screening.

Protease Inhibitor: The latest class of drugs used to treat hepatitis C genotype 1 infections. Protease inhibitors prevent the hepatitis C virus from replicating and are taken along with pegylated interferon and ribavirin during hepatitis C treatment.

Protein: A substance made of a string of amino acids. Your body produces many kinds of proteins. Some serve as building blocks for the body and some help the body carry out functions.

Protocol: A step-by-step procedure or plan. A doctor may refer to a treatment plan as a protocol even if you are not in a clinical trial.

R

Recombinant Immunoblot Assay (RIBA): A type of test to measure the presence of antibodies in the blood.

Reconstitution: The process of adding liquid to a dry powder in order to make a solution. Prescription drugs that are given by injection are often provided as a dry powder, which must be reconstituted before it can be used.

Recreational Drugs (illicit drug use): Illegal drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, and heroin or legal drugs (like medications) used for non-medical purposes.

Relapse: The return (or recurrence) of symptoms of a disease after a period of improvement.

Remission: A period of time when all or some of the symptoms of a disease have disappeared or decreased. Remission may occur spontaneously (all by itself) or because of medical treatment.

Ribavirin: Ribavirin is an anti-viral medication. It stimulates the immune system to fight viruses. It is used in combination with interferon for hepatitis C treatment.

Risk Factors: Conditions, activities, or behaviors that increase an individual's chance of developing a certain disease. Risk factors are identified by observing large groups of people and seeing what they have in common. Having a risk factor does

not guarantee a person will acquire or develop a disease. For example: smoking is a risk factor for lung cancer.

S

Screening: Testing for signs of a disease. A positive screening test is NOT the same as a diagnosis of a disease. Screening tests are often used to identify people who should be examined further.

Self-Administration: Patients administer (or give) themselves a therapy. Many hepatitis patients give themselves their interferon injections rather than having a doctor or nurse administer the injection.

Serology: Refers to the study of serum (the clear portion of body fluids) for certain substances like antibodies.

Spleen: An organ located in the left upper abdomen that removes old red blood cells and other blood cells from circulation. The spleen can enlarge in a person who has cirrhosis due to the large number of platelets.

STD or STI (sexually transmitted disease or infection): A disease transmitted through sexual contact.

Sustained Viral Response (SVR): A response to therapy that continues over a long period of time. In hepatitis C, SVR means the virus has not been detected for at least 6 months after treatment.

T

Transaminases: Refers to SGOT or SGPT, which are older terms for the ALT and AST.

Transfusion: The introduction of blood or components of blood (such as plasma, platelets) from one person into another.

Transmission: The spread of disease from one person or animal to another.

U

Universal precautions: A set of guidelines developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control intended to decrease the risk of spreading illness and disease in healthcare settings. Specifically, universal precautions are to be used when coming into contact with certain types of body fluids, such as blood, semen, and vaginal fluids. When handling these fluids, all measures to avoid exposure should be taken, including wearing gloves and other protective covers; avoiding injury; and proper disposal of affected materials.

V

Vaccine: A medication that stimulates the production of antibodies to protect against a specific disease. Vaccines are available for hepatitis A and B.

Variceal Bleeding: Abnormal bleeding from broken blood vessels in the esophagus (throat). The bleeding occurs when blood flow through the liver is blocked. Patients with advanced cirrhosis can develop this condition. Variceal bleeding is an EMERGENCY. CALL 911!

Viral hepatitis: Inflammation of the liver caused by viruses that specifically attack the liver. Viruses include hepatitis A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.

Viral Load: Measurement of the amount of virus in the bloodstream.

Viremia: Refers to the presence of a given virus in the bloodstream.

Virologic response: A reduction in the amount of virus in the blood in response to treatment.

Virus: A microorganism that can infect the body. Many types of viruses exist such as those causing influenza, and hepatitis.

W

White blood cells: Cells the body makes to help fight infection.

*If you did not find the term you are looking for,
contact HepTREC. We will assist you!*

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