It Makes Your Eye Yellow Then You Get Better?

There is More to Hepatitis B
This is a story of an immigrant family from Ethiopia

Disclaimer: The people portrayed in this photo novel are actors. The story, all names, characters, and incidents described in this photo novel are fictitious.
Hepatitis B is a disease caused by a virus. It affects the liver.

**Facts About Hepatitis B**

- Most people infected with the virus don’t show any symptoms. But some people might have fever, fatigue, grey-colored stools, dark urine, or yellow eyes.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is among the regions of the world where chronic hepatitis B is common to this day.
- A blood test is the best way to know if you have the disease.

At home after the Ethiopian community health fair

Mom, Dad, did you enjoy the health fair? I want to talk to you about hepatitis B. Do you remember what the presenter said?

You mean the one about the liver? We call it “Yewof Beshita”. It is the one that makes your eye yellow.
Yes, it is called hepatitis B. The presenter said we should get screened since we come from a country where the disease is common.

I made appointments with our primary care doctor. Before the visit though we have to go to the lab for blood work.
At Dr. Johnson’s office

Hello. It is nice to meet you. As you know, we have screened you for hepatitis B.

Excuse me Dr. Johnson, as you know, my parents don’t speak English well and I think you should call a professional interpreter.

Very well, let me get an interpreter on the phone. You speak Amharic right?

Yes.

Hello, I’ll be interpreting over the phone for you.

Interpreter is on the line.
Tigist, your result for the virus is also negative but you don’t have the antibody meaning you are susceptible to get the infection. I suggest you get vaccinated.

Mrs. Almaz, your test indicates that you were once exposed to the virus and that you have developed natural defense or antibody.

I will refer you to a liver specialist for more testing.

Mr. Hailu, your result is positive-meaning you have chronic hepatitis B. Unfortunately, you have had this infection for a long time without knowing it, and may have damaged your liver.

I understand hepatitis B is passed on through sexual contact, sharing needles, syringes, or other shared sharp objects.

But, my father is very religious. How can he get a disease that is transmitted this way?

I looked at your father’s chart and it says that he was born and raised in Ethiopia.

It is possible that he may have gotten it from his mother during birth - one of the most common ways of transmission before we had vaccines.
Many people with chronic hepatitis B do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected.

If he got it a long time ago why did he not have any symptoms?

But where we came from “ye wof beshita” is common and not as serious as you say it is.

But in some people, like your husband, the immune system does not get rid of the virus. In fact, symptoms of chronic hepatitis B can take up to 30 years to develop. Damage to the liver can silently occur during this time. For this reason, the disease is called a silent killer.

You get sick for a few days and you get well and you never get sick again”.

You are right! For some people the disease may be temporary and their immune system is able to fight off the virus.
There are steps you can take. It is important to keep all cuts covered, avoid sharing any sharp instruments such as razors, toothbrushes, or earrings, since small amounts of blood can be exchanged through these items.

So is there a cure for this disease?

Right now, there is no cure for chronic hepatitis B, but the good news is there are new treatments that can help slow the progression of liver disease.

How can I prevent spreading hepatitis B to others?

There are steps you can take. It is important to keep all cuts covered, avoid sharing any sharp instruments such as razors, toothbrushes, or earrings, since small amounts of blood can be exchanged through these items.
Can hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated, which is a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. The entire series is needed for long-term protection.

More Info About Hepatitis B

- In 15-40% of individuals infected, it may lead to serious damage to the liver, including cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver cancer, and death.
- For Africans with chronic hepatitis B, liver cancer screening guidelines start at 25 for men and 40 for women. For non-Africans, the screening age is 50.

How to Prevent Spreading Hepatitis B

- The hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective. It is a series of 3 shots given over 6 months.
- However, this vaccine is not effective if the person already has hepatitis B.
Back at home after the visit to the Doctor’s office

Dad, as the doctor said, you have had the hepatitis B virus in your body without knowing it. Let me tell you what I have read in this brochure. It says that if you have chronic hepatitis B, you should do things to take care of yourself, including eating a healthy diet. Avoid drinking alcohol, which can harm the liver. Talk with your doctor before taking vitamins and other supplements.

You know I drink only on occasions and when I do, I drink mostly Tej.

Even with traditional drinks like Tej dad, you have to be careful.
I know, there is good traditional medicine in Ethiopia for “ye wof beshita”. I will tell my sister to send me some. That will cure him right away.

Don’t worry mom and dad we will get through this together.

Mom, it says here that many of the so called traditional medicines can actually be toxic on the liver and could be dangerous. So the best thing for us to do is to go see the liver specialist in a few days.

*Hepatitis B is not spread through hugging
THE END

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