

# Hepatitis B and athletics

Participation in athletics is an important extracurricular activity for many young Alaskans. Sports activities involving close contact between participants may rarely cause transmission of communicable diseases.

Injuries and bleeding can occur during contact sports and it is possible for hepatitis B virus (HBV) to be transmitted through blood-to-blood contact with an infected individual.

Hepatitis B virus is transmitted primarily through sexual contact and direct blood-to-blood exchange. Although HBV would seem to be a risk to athletes participating in contact sports, there is only one report of sport-related hepatitis B transmission—a small outbreak among members of a high school sumo wrestling team in Japan. Undue concern about hepatitis B in athletics diverts attention from the well-documented and far higher risks of HBV transmission through sexual contact or injecting drug use.

The Alaska Section of Epidemiology makes the following recommendations concerning hepatitis B virus and athletics:

1. Based on scientific evidence to date, the risk of HBV transmission through participation in athletics is extremely low.

2. There is no public health basis for excluding a person from participation in any sport because of HBV infection. Participation should be determined by the athlete's physician after medical evaluation of the seriousness of the illness.

3. There is no medical or public health justification for routine HBV testing of participants in any sports activity.

4. Consistent with routine, sound public health practice, all sports teams should employ universal precautions when providing first-aid or when cleaning-up blood or body fluids visibly contaminated with blood.

5. Athletes, coaches, and athletic trainers should receive information on HBV prevention. This training should focus on high-risk behaviors associated with HBV transmission: sexual intercourse and blood-to-blood transmission as a result of sharing contaminated drug injection equipment. The risk associated with sharing needles/syringes for anabolic steroid injection should be included.

6. HBV immunization should be encouraged for all adolescents and young adults engaging in high-risk behaviors; e.g., injecting drug use or sexually active.