Hepatitis is defined as an inflammation of the liver resulting in destruction of the organ's architecture. Many etiologic agents are responsible for hepatitis, however most hepatitis is of viral origin. The signs, symptoms, and stages of viral hepatitis vary greatly. Some patients may be asymptomatic. When symptoms are experienced, they are often described as flu-like. Viral hepatitis occurs as either an acute or chronic infection. The article presents a comprehensive review of viral hepatitis types A through G. Definitions, causes, signs and symptoms, diagnosis, pathogenesis, and acute and chronic forms of hepatitis are included. Also discussed are modes of transmission, risk groups, morbidity and mortality, epidemiology, and treatment modalities.

DIS Comment: In dental settings, dental patients and dental health-care personnel (DHCP) may be exposed to a variety of pathogenic microorganisms, including bloodborne viruses (e.g., hepatitis B and C). Although transmission of bloodborne pathogens in dental health-care settings can have serious consequences, it is a rare event. Transmission can occur as a result of exposure to infected blood from patient-to-DHCP, from DHCP-to-patient, and from one patient to another. The opportunity for transmission is most likely from patient to DHCP, who frequently encounter patient blood and blood-contaminated saliva during dental procedures. There have been no reported cases of transmission of HBV since 1987 from DHCP-to-patients. There have been no reported cases of HCV transmission from DHCP to patients. Hepatitis B vaccination and infection control practices (e.g., standard precautions, engineering and work practice controls) have reduced infections in health-care personnel. This article provides an excellent overview of current information on hepatitis for DHCP and will help identify patients who will potentially have complications as the result of invasive dental treatment.