

Hepatitis B Vaccine

For newborn babies

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver infection. It is caused by a virus. It can cause severe illness, liver cancer, and even death. Many people who get hepatitis B do not look or feel sick. Others may have a loss of appetite, stomach pain, extreme tiredness, or yellow skin or eyes.

Why does my baby need a hepatitis B vaccine?

Babies are less able to fight hepatitis B infection than older children or adults. If a baby is infected:

- There is a 90% chance they will develop chronic hepatitis B, the most serious form of the disease.
- There is a 25% chance that a baby with chronic hepatitis B will die of liver problems later in life.

Many schools and preschools will not admit children who have not had this vaccine.



We advise that all babies get the hepatitis B vaccine at birth, followed by 2 more doses within 6 months.

How do I know if my baby is exposed to the virus?

You may not know if your baby is exposed. A baby or young child can become infected by coming in contact with a household member, caregiver, or another child who has the disease. Anyone who has the virus can spread it to others, even if they do not look or feel sick.

How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis B virus can spread by:

- Contact with blood or certain body fluids of an infected person
- An infected mother to her newborn during childbirth
- Using unsterile needles for injections, body piercing, or tattooing
- Using contaminated razors, toothbrushes, towels, and nail clippers
- Unprotected sex
- Human bites, wound-to-wound contact
- Living with someone who has chronic hepatitis B infection

Hepatitis B is **not** spread through food or water, kissing, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, coughing, sweat, tears, or urine.

Please review the list of places below. You and your baby are at higher risk for hepatitis B infection if you, or someone you live with, was born in one of these places, has visited there, or will be traveling there.

- Africa
- Alaska (rural)
- Amazon Basin
- Asia
- Eastern Europe
- Former Soviet Union
- Middle East
- Pacific Islands

What can I do to protect my baby?

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advise that all babies get the hepatitis B vaccine at birth, followed by 2 more doses within 6 months. All 3 doses are needed for the best protection.

Is the vaccine safe?

The hepatitis B vaccine is safe. It has been used in the U.S. since 1982. The most common side effects to the vaccine are soreness where the shot is given and a low fever. These may last 1 to 2 days.

How do I get a vaccine for my baby?

Your baby's nurse can give the first shot to your baby before your baby leaves the hospital. Talk with your baby's clinic doctor, nurse, or public health clinic about all the vaccines your child will need.

To Learn More

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

800.232.4636 (TTY) 888.232.6348

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/default.htm

Immunization Action Coalition

www.immunize.org/birthdose

Washington State Department of Health

866.397.0337

www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/Immunization/DiseasesandVaccines/HepatitisBDiseases

WithinReach, The Family Health Hotline

800.322.2588

www.withinreachwa.org

Public Health – Seattle & King County Perinatal Hepatitis B Prevention Program

206.296.4774

www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/providers/phbpp.aspx

Now, please go back to the Table of Contents in this workbook and check the box so your nurses will know you have read this chapter.

The information in this handout is adapted from "Hepatitis B Vaccine" by the Washington State Department of Health, © May 2015.

Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have questions or concerns, call your baby's healthcare provider.