

HEPATITIS B VACCINE

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

1 What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious disease that affects the liver. It is caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). HBV can cause:

Acute (short-term) illness. This can lead to:

- loss of appetite
- diarrhea and vomiting
- tiredness
- jaundice (yellow skin or eyes)
- pain in muscles, joints, and stomach

Acute illness is more common among adults. Children who become infected usually do not have acute illness.

Chronic (long-term) infection. Some people go on to develop chronic HBV infection. This can be very serious, and often leads to:

- liver damage (cirrhosis)
- liver cancer
- death

Chronic infection is more common among infants and children than among adults. People who are infected can spread HBV to others, even if they don't appear sick.

- In 2005, about 51,000 people became infected with hepatitis B.
- About 1.25 million people in the United States have chronic HBV infection.
- Each year about 3,000 to 5,000 people die from cirrhosis or liver cancer caused by HBV.

Hepatitis B virus is spread through contact with the blood or other body fluids of an infected person. A person can become infected by:

- contact with a mother's blood and body fluids at the time of birth;
- contact with blood and body fluids through breaks in the skin such as bites, cuts, or sores;
- contact with objects that could have blood or body fluids on them such as toothbrushes or razors;
- having unprotected sex with an infected person;
- sharing needles when injecting drugs;
- being stuck with a used needle on the job.

2 Hepatitis B vaccine: Why get vaccinated?

Hepatitis B vaccine can prevent hepatitis B, and the serious consequences of HBV infection, including liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Routine hepatitis B vaccination of U.S. children began in 1991. Since then, the reported incidence of acute hepatitis B among children and adolescents has dropped by more than 95% – and by 75% in all age groups.

Hepatitis B vaccine is made from a part of the hepatitis B virus. It cannot cause HBV infection.

Hepatitis B vaccine is usually given as a **series of 3 or 4 shots**. This vaccine series gives long-term protection from HBV infection, possibly lifelong.

3 Who should get hepatitis B vaccine and when?

Children and Adolescents

- All children should get their first dose of hepatitis B vaccine **at birth** and should have completed the vaccine series by 6-18 months of age.
- Children and adolescents through 18 years of age who did not get the vaccine when they were younger should also be vaccinated.

Adults

- All unvaccinated adults **at risk for HBV infection** should be vaccinated. This includes:
 - sex partners of people infected with HBV,
 - men who have sex with men,
 - people who inject street drugs,
 - people with more than one sex partner,
 - people with chronic liver or kidney disease,
 - people with jobs that expose them to human blood,
 - household contacts of people infected with HBV,
 - residents and staff in institutions for the developmentally disabled,
 - kidney dialysis patients,

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