

Hepatitis B Vaccine and Your Baby: What You Need To Know

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (known as HBV). Hepatitis B can cause liver cancer, liver disease and death.

Why Does Your Baby Need the Hepatitis B Vaccine at Birth?

Hepatitis B is a serious disease. The vaccine will help protect your baby.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that your baby receives the hepatitis B vaccine shortly after birth.

When babies receive the vaccine at birth, they are protected sooner from the virus.

- Babies and children are not able to fight off the virus as well as adults.
- Children who are exposed to the hepatitis B virus are more likely to get it and develop a serious illness in the future compared to adults who get exposed later in life.
- It is possible for your baby to get exposed to the virus before they start to get vaccinations at a clinic.

How is Hepatitis B Spread?

Hepatitis B is spread through blood or other body fluids that have small amounts of blood of an infected person. It can survive on surfaces for 7 days.

Most people with hepatitis B don't know they have it and may not have any symptoms. They can then spread the virus to others without knowing it.

Some of the ways infants and children can get hepatitis B include:

- at birth (if their mother is infected)
- by sharing personal items (such as toothbrushes) used by an infected person
- by touching open cuts or sores of an infected person
- from bites from an infected person
- from food that was chewed (for a baby) by an infected person
- from ear piercing needles that were not cleaned well.

Is There a Cure for Hepatitis B?

No. There is no cure for Hepatitis B. There are medicines that can help people who have long-lasting hepatitis B infection.

About 9 out of 10 infected babies will develop a long-lasting infection. This can lead to liver disease or liver cancer later in life.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to help prevent hepatitis B.

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Is the Hepatitis B Vaccine Safe?

Yes. The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) tests all vaccines for 10 years or longer. The FDA tests a vaccine to see how safe it is and how well it works before distributing it. After the vaccine is in use, the FDA and the CDC monitor for side effects.

More than 100 million people in the United States have been vaccinated with the hepatitis B vaccine. Severe reactions to the vaccine are extremely rare.

Is Your Baby's Immune System Strong Enough to Get the Hepatitis B Vaccine?

Yes. Your baby's immune system is strong enough to get the vaccine at birth. The vaccine will help your baby build antibodies, which helps protect them against the virus.

Most babies do not have any side effects with getting the vaccine. It is possible for your baby to have mild reactions such as a fever or soreness at the shot site.

How Many Doses of the Hepatitis B Vaccine Will Your Baby Need?

Your baby will need three to four doses for total protection at these ages:

- First dose: At birth (within 12 hours if the mother has hepatitis B)
- Second dose: Between 1 and 3 months
- Third dose: Between 6 and 18 months.

Some children may need a fourth dose. Talk with your child's health care provider to find out how many shots your child will need.

Older children who did not get the vaccine as a baby should get it as soon as possible.

How Effective is the Hepatitis B Vaccine?

According to the CDC, almost all children (95 children out of 100) who get the recommended doses will be protected from hepatitis B.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.