

Hepatitis B vaccine

**Keep your child safe.
Get all vaccines on time.**

By getting all vaccines on time, your child can be protected from many diseases over a lifetime.

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is the hepatitis B vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine protects against the hepatitis B virus. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

Who should get the vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine is free for babies as part of their routine immunizations. It is usually combined with other childhood vaccines such as diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b. For more information visit [HealthLinkBC File #105 Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, polio and Haemophilus influenzae type b \(DTaP-HB-IPV-Hib\) vaccine](#). Some babies may receive the hepatitis B vaccine separately, for more information visit [HealthLinkBC File #25c Hepatitis B infant vaccine](#).

If you were born in 1980 or later and have not received the hepatitis B vaccine or the recommended number of doses for your age. The vaccine is also free.

The vaccine is free for children and adults at high risk of hepatitis B infection, including:

- Household contacts of internationally adopted children
- Household and sexual contacts of someone with hepatitis B
- Males who have sexual contact with other males
- Those with many sexual partners or a recent sexually transmitted infection
- People who use illicit drugs and sexual partners of those who use illicit drugs
- Those with chronic liver disease

- Those who have hepatitis C or had it in the past
- Those with chronic kidney disease including pre-dialysis, hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis patients
- Those who received a stem cell transplant
- Those who had an islet cell or solid organ transplant or are waiting for one
- People born with an immune deficiency
- Those who have hemophilia or receive repeated infusions of blood or blood products
- Those who are HIV positive
- Inmates of a correctional facility
- Teachers, staff and students in a childcare setting attended by a child with hepatitis B, whose behaviour or medical condition increases the chances of exposure to that child's blood or body fluids
- Staff or residents in a community group home for persons with developmental disabilities
- Students training in a health care profession, health care workers, pharmacists and others who may have contact with blood and body fluids in their jobs

Health care workers, pharmacists and others who may have contact with blood or body fluids in their jobs can get the hepatitis B vaccine at no cost through their employer.

Anyone who is not eligible for a free hepatitis B vaccine can buy it at most pharmacies and travel clinics.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine protects against hepatitis B infection and its complications such as permanent liver damage, which can lead to liver cancer and death. When you get immunized, you help protect others as well.

What are the possible reactions after the vaccine?

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get hepatitis B.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the injection was given. Fever, headache, fatigue, nausea and diarrhea may also occur.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen* (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye syndrome.

*Ibuprofen should not be given to children under 6 months of age without first speaking to your health care provider.

For more information on Reye syndrome, visit [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. There is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This happens in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine. Symptoms may include hives, difficulty breathing or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, your healthcare provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call [9-1-1](#) or the local emergency number.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

Who should not get the vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis B vaccine or any part of the vaccine such as yeast or to latex.

There is no need to delay getting immunized because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you have concerns, speak with your health care provider.

What is hepatitis B infection?

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It can cause serious disease including permanent liver damage (cirrhosis). Hepatitis B is also one of the main causes of liver cancer, which can be fatal. The hepatitis B virus spreads through contact with blood or body fluids from a person infected with the virus. You can get infected by sharing items that have blood on them such as toothbrushes, razors, dental floss or needles used to inject drugs. If you are splashed in the mouth, nose or eyes with infected blood, bitten by someone with hepatitis B or poked with a needle containing contaminated blood you may be exposed to the virus. The virus can also spread through unprotected sex with a person infected with the hepatitis B virus. Pregnant people with hepatitis B can pass the virus to their newborn babies during delivery.

After the virus enters your body, it usually takes 2 to 3 months to develop symptoms or signs of illness. You may experience fatigue, fever, nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, dark urine, pale stools and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Many people who get hepatitis B show no symptoms and may not know they have the disease. Whether there are signs of illness or not, you can spread the virus to others.

Mature minor consent

It is recommended that parents or guardians and their children discuss consent for immunization. Children under the age of 19, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risk of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations. For more information on mature minor consent visit [HealthLinkBC File #119 The Infants Act, mature minor consent and immunization](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-library/healthlinkbc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C., visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.