

Protecting your baby against hepatitis B at birth

**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. It is provided free to babies as part of their routine immunizations. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. When babies get infected, the virus usually stays in their body for life. Over time, this can cause serious health problems such as permanent liver damage (cirrhosis). Hepatitis B is also a main cause of liver cancer, which can be fatal. That is why it is important to get protection from the vaccine at a young age.

Who should get the hepatitis B vaccine at birth?

Babies receive the hepatitis B vaccine at birth if their mother has hepatitis B or is at high risk of infection. A baby should also get the vaccine at birth if a household member or caregiver has hepatitis B. For a list of those who are at higher risk of hepatitis B infection, visit [HealthLinkBC File #25a Hepatitis B vaccine](#).

How is a baby protected against hepatitis B at birth?

If a mother has hepatitis B or is at risk of infection, her baby will receive 2 immunizations at birth:

- Hepatitis B immune globulin: Gives the baby immediate protection through antibodies against the hepatitis B virus
- Hepatitis B vaccine: Helps the baby make their own antibodies

If the mother does not have hepatitis B, but a household member or a caregiver does, the baby will only receive the hepatitis B vaccine at birth.

After birth, the baby will receive 3 more doses of hepatitis B vaccine at 2, 4 and 6 months of age. These doses are given along with other routine childhood vaccines. For more information, visit [HealthLinkBC File #105 Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, polio and Haemophilus influenzae type b \(DTaP-HB-IPV-Hib\) vaccine](#).

Babies immunized at birth need to have a blood test 4 weeks after their last dose of hepatitis B vaccine to make sure they are protected.

Some babies who received hepatitis B vaccine at birth may be on a different immunization schedule. If you are unsure when your baby should get immunized or tested, talk to your health care provider. It is important to keep a record of all immunizations your baby receives.

For more information on hepatitis B immune globulin or the hepatitis B infant vaccine visit [HealthlinkBC File #25b Hepatitis B immune globulin](#) and [HealthLinkBC File #25c Hepatitis B infant vaccine](#).

What are the benefits of the hepatitis B vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine is the best way to protect your child from hepatitis B and its complications, including permanent liver damage, liver cancer and death.

When you get your child immunized, you help protect others as well.

What are the possible reactions after the vaccine?

The vaccine is 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 vaccine was given. Some children may experience fever, fussiness or fatigue.

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 health care 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.

How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B spreads through contact with infected blood and some body fluids - for example during childbirth. It can spread by sharing items that may have blood on them such as toothbrushes, razors, dental floss, nail files, and needles used to inject drugs. It can also spread through unprotected sex with a person infected with the hepatitis B virus.

People who live in the same household as someone with hepatitis B are at higher risk of getting infected and should get the hepatitis B vaccine. The vaccine is free for these individuals. Contact your health care provider to make an appointment. For more information on the hepatitis B vaccine, visit [HealthLinkBC File #25a Hepatitis B vaccine](#).

Can I breastfeed my baby if I have hepatitis B?

Yes, you can breastfeed. Hepatitis B does not spread through breastfeeding unless your nipples are cracked or bleeding.

For more information

For more information on immunizations in B.C., visit [HealthLink BC's Immunization schedules](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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