

Hepatitis B Vaccine

Communicable Disease Control – Factsheet

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention. Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

What is the Hepatitis B Vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine protects you against hepatitis B infection.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks your liver. Symptoms of hepatitis B are tiredness, mild fever, abdominal pain and loss of appetite. An important sign is yellow skin and eyes (jaundice) that may last for weeks or months.

Most people with hepatitis B get better within 3 months (acute infection), but some people carry the infection for the rest of their lives (chronic infection). Chronic infection affects about 10 of every 100 adults, and 90 of every 100 babies who get hepatitis B. Chronic infection can cause permanent liver damage, including cancer.

There are other types of hepatitis that are caused by other viruses, and those diseases have separate protective steps. The hepatitis B vaccine will only protect you against the hepatitis B virus.

The hepatitis B vaccine comprises a group (or series) of shots that are given over a few months. It is extremely important to get all the shots in the series. Once you finish, you will be protected against hepatitis B for the rest of your life.

There is a separate treatment for people who may have already been exposed to the hepatitis B virus. Speak to your health care professional as soon as possible if you had blood-to-blood contact or unprotected sex with someone who may be infected with hepatitis B.

How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis B can be spread from person to person by:

- Blood-to-blood contact from: cuts or bites; tattoos, ear or body piercing done with dirty or unsterilized equipment; sharing needles; using an infected person's toothbrush, razor, nail file or other personal care item.
- Unprotected sex (sex without a condom) with an infected person.

A mother with hepatitis B can pass the virus to her newborn baby during delivery. Children can get hepatitis B from infected people at home, from caregivers, or even from other children who don't know they're infected.

You cannot catch the virus from sneezes, coughs or hugs, or by using the same dishes or toilet seat as someone who has hepatitis B.

Who should get the Hepatitis B vaccine?

Immunization is the best way to protect against hepatitis B.

When you and your child are immunized, you also help protect others, because someone who is immunized is less likely to spread infection. The hepatitis B vaccine works best when it is given to young children before they come in contact with the virus. It is especially important for people to get immunized with hepatitis B if they are:

- Health care and emergency service workers
- The household contacts, caregivers, friends and family of a person who has hepatitis B
- People who live in a correctional or long-term care facility
- People who have a health condition that affects their liver
- People who have lifestyle risks, including street-drug use and risky sexual practices
- People travelling to areas where hepatitis B is common

Talk to your doctor or public health nurse to see if you, or your child, are eligible to receive the hepatitis B vaccine free-of-charge as part of the recommended immunization schedule.

Or visit:

Manitoba Public Health website

www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html

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Who should not get the Hepatitis B vaccine?

You should not get the vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the hepatitis B vaccine or if you are allergic to any of the contents of the vaccine (e.g. yeast, latex, formaldehyde).

Anyone who has a high fever should not be immunized. The vaccine can still be given if the illness is mild, like a cold.

Possible side-effects of the Hepatitis B vaccine

Vaccines are known to be very safe. It is much safer for you and your child to get the vaccine than to get hepatitis B.

Common reactions to the vaccine include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Some people may have fever, drowsiness, dizziness, or an upset stomach. These are mild reactions and usually last one to two days. Acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Temptra®) can be given for fever or soreness.

ASA (Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.**

Report any serious or unexpected side-effects to a public health nurse or doctor.

Your record of protection

Make sure your doctor or public health nurse updates your own, or your child's, immunization record card, after you receive an immunization. Keep the card in a safe place!

Information about the immunizations you or your children receive may be recorded in the Manitoba Immunization Monitoring System (MIMS). This computerized database allows your doctor, your child's doctor or your public health nurse to find out what immunizations you or your child have had or need to have. Information collected in MIMS may be used to produce immunization records, or notify you or your doctor if someone has missed a particular immunization. Manitoba Health may use the information to monitor how well different vaccines work in preventing disease. If you need information on the immunizations that you or your child has received, contact your doctor, your local public health unit or nursing station.

For more information on the Hepatitis B vaccine:

Talk to your doctor or public health nurse.

Call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204 788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.

For national recommendations, visit the **Public Health Agency of Canada website** www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php

Or visit:

Canadian Pediatric Society website
www.cps.ca