

Hepatitis B Vaccine

What is this disease?

Hepatitis B (HBV), or serum hepatitis virus, can cause infection at any age. It may lead to chronic infection of the liver and serious disease, especially if it is acquired during infancy or childhood. However, a child may not show signs of infection until years later when he or she develops liver failure and/or liver cancer.

HBV is transmitted in several ways, including being passed from mother to infant at the time of birth. Young children may be infected by someone living in the same household who is infected, even if that person does not appear to be sick (a carrier of HBV). Finally, HBV can spread through sexual intercourse or through contact with infected blood, such as when drug users share needles.

It is important that your child be protected by the hepatitis B vaccine, because infection acquired during early life is most likely to cause chronic liver disease. More than 95 percent of children who receive all the recommended doses of the hepatitis B vaccine are protected against the illnesses caused by the hepatitis B virus.

When should my child get the hepatitis B vaccine?

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, your child needs three doses of hepatitis B vaccine to be fully protected against hepatitis B infection. Ordinarily, the first vaccination will be given at birth, the second dose at 1 to 4 months, and a third dose at 6 to 18 months of age.

The first dose of the vaccine is delayed for many premature babies (and those with other illnesses during the first days of life). Newborns who have not received a vaccine dose at birth should receive three hepatitis B vaccine doses by 18 months of age.

However, if the mother tests positive for hepatitis B, the child must receive the first vaccine dose as well as hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) at or shortly after birth. The child also requires a second dose at 1 month and the final vaccine dose by 6 months of age.

Talk to our staff if you have questions about this vaccination or about other circumstances when this vaccine is used. We or she can answer any questions you may have about when your child should receive the hepatitis B vaccine.

Are there side effects to hepatitis B vaccine?

No serious reactions have been linked to this vaccine, and most children have no side effects. Those side effects that sometimes occur—fussiness and soreness—are usually mild and temporary. These symptoms may begin within 24 hours after the shot is given and usually go away within 48 to 72 hours.

Immunizations have provided protection for children for years— but the vaccines only work if you make sure your child gets immunized.

Remember, your child's health depends on it!