



## Protecting Your Baby against Hepatitis B at Birth

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

By getting all shots 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 are hepatitis B vaccines?

Hepatitis B vaccines protect against the hepatitis B virus and are provided free to your baby. The vaccines are approved by Health Canada.

### What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that gets into the blood and goes to the liver. When babies get hepatitis B, the virus is very likely to stay in the body forever. If the virus stays in the body for a long time it can harm the liver. There is also a higher risk of getting liver cancer. Your liver is a vital organ and you only have one.

### Who should get hepatitis B vaccine at birth?

Protection at birth against hepatitis B is recommended for a baby born to a mother with hepatitis B or a mother at high risk of getting the disease from intravenous drug use or sex trade work. A mother can give the virus to her baby at birth.

### How is a baby protected against hepatitis B at birth?

When a mother is infected with hepatitis B or at risk of disease, her baby will receive two

shots at birth. One is hepatitis B immune globulin. It is made of antibodies that fight hepatitis B germs right away. The other shot is the hepatitis B vaccine, which helps the baby make his or her own antibodies. A baby whose mother is not infected but who has a household member or a caregiver with hepatitis B would get only the hepatitis B vaccine at birth.

After birth, the baby will need 3 more doses or shots of hepatitis B vaccine at 2, 4 and 6 months. These are given at the same time as the other childhood vaccines.

Babies who have had the immune globulin or hepatitis B vaccine at birth need to have a blood test after the last dose of vaccine to make sure the vaccine has protected them.

Hepatitis B Vaccines	Child's Age at Vaccination
1 <sup>st</sup> dose	At birth
2 <sup>nd</sup> dose	2 months
3 <sup>rd</sup> dose	4 months
4 <sup>th</sup> dose	6 months
Blood test	4 weeks after dose 4

It is important to get all shots on time. Keep a record of all immunizations received.

### How is hepatitis B spread?

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

People with hepatitis B do not always know they are infected and can spread it to others. People living in the same house with someone who has hepatitis B are at higher risk of getting infected and they should get the hepatitis B vaccine. Contact your local public health unit or your family doctor. This vaccine is free.

### Can I breastfeed my baby if I have hepatitis B?

Mothers with hepatitis B can breastfeed as long as their babies have received 1 dose of hepatitis B immune globulin and 1 dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth. It is important that babies get the rest of their doses or shots at 2, 4 and 6 months for full protection after birth.

### Benefits of hepatitis B vaccine

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

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

### Who should not get hepatitis B vaccine?

When you bring your baby for vaccines at 2, 4 and 6 months, speak with a public health nurse or doctor if your baby has had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis B vaccine, or any component of the vaccine including yeast, or to latex.

### Possible reactions after the vaccines

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, itchiness, redness and swelling where the shot was given. Mild fever or general discomfort may also occur.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol® can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 911 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated and occurs in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine.

**Report serious or unexpected reactions to your public health nurse or doctor.**

**For more information, see the following HealthLinkBC Files:**

[#25a Hepatitis B Vaccine](#)

[#25b Hepatitis B Immune Globulin](#)

[#25c Hepatitis B Infant Vaccine](#)

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/index.stm) or your local public health unit.

Click on [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca) or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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ImmunizeBC



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