

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 provided free to 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 see [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 see [HealthLinkBC File #25c Hepatitis B Infant Vaccine](#).

People born in 1980 or later who have never received the hepatitis B vaccine or have not received the recommended number of doses for their age can also get the vaccine for free.

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

- Children under 12 years of age whose families have emigrated from areas with high rates of hepatitis B.
- 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.
- Illicit drug users and their sexual partners.
- Those with chronic liver disease, hepatitis C, or a liver transplant.
- Those with chronic kidney disease including predialysis, hemodialysis, or peritoneal dialysis patients.
- Those who have received a kidney or stem cell transplant.
- 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 the developmentally challenged.
- 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.

Anyone who is not eligible for a free hepatitis B vaccine can purchase 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 is highly effective. It 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 vaccine was given. Some may experience a mild fever.

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, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye Syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility, less than 1 in a million, of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. Should this reaction occur, 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.

It is important to 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 component 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. Hepatitis B virus is spread from one infected person to another by contact with blood or body fluids. This includes an accidental or intentional poke with a used needle, being splashed in the mouth, nose, or eyes with infected blood, being bitten by an infected person, sharing items that may have blood on them such as a toothbrush, dental floss or razor, and by having unprotected sex with someone infected with the hepatitis B virus. Mothers who are infected with hepatitis B virus 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. Symptoms of hepatitis B may include 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 pass the virus on 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 see [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/more/resources/healthlink-bc-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.