

# Hepatitis B Vaccine: Your Questions Answered



*Hepatitis B* is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). HBV can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death. Most people who have chronic hepatitis B don't know they have it. There is no cure. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to get vaccinated.

## ● How does hepatitis B spread?

- Contact with the blood, semen, or other bodily fluids from a person infected with HBV.
- Many people infected with HBV do not have any symptoms and can pass the virus onto others without knowing.
- Babies and children can get HBV during:
  - Birth from an infected pregnant person.
  - Breastfeeding, by touching open cuts or sores, or through sharing personal items from an infected person.

## ● How do I avoid getting hepatitis B?

- **Get vaccinated.** All children, especially infants, and adults through age 59 years should be vaccinated for hepatitis B.
  - Adults 60 and older with risk factors should also get vaccinated for hepatitis B.
- **Get tested.** Two in three people with hepatitis B don't know they have it.
  - All pregnant people should get tested, even if vaccinated or previously tested, to prevent passing HBV to their baby during childbirth.



## ● Why do newborns need the hepatitis B vaccine?

- **Babies are best protected when they get the vaccine early (the first 24 hours of life)** as their immune systems are not fully developed.
- Without preventive treatment or vaccination, 70% to 90% of infants born to an infected parent will become infected themselves. About 90% of those infections will become chronic.
- The hepatitis B vaccine gives **long-term protection** against illness from acute and chronic infection.

## ● When should newborns and infants get the hepatitis B vaccine?

- To be fully protected, children should get a dose of the hepatitis B vaccine at **birth, 1-2 months old, and 6-18 months old**.

## Is the hepatitis B vaccine safe?

- More than 120 million people in the U.S., including infants, children, and adults have received the hepatitis B vaccine.
- The **hepatitis B vaccine is safe, effective, and vital** to protecting babies and children from serious disease.



## Learn more!

Visit the [Perinatal Hepatitis B Prevention Program](#), or  
Call 866-358-2966 and select 'option 5' to speak to a Public Health Nurse.

