

Hepatitis B vaccination at birth

Information for pregnant women

The hepatitis B vaccine can protect your baby from life-long illness, serious liver disease and liver cancer.

Why does my baby need hepatitis B vaccine at birth?

The vaccine is recommended within 24 hours of birth to:

- prevent the spread from a mother to her baby, or from an infected person in close contact
- reduce the risk of your baby developing chronic hepatitis B.

The vaccine can also be given within the first 7 days of life. For lasting protection additional doses are given as part of the routine infant immunisation schedule.

The vaccine is free of charge under the National Immunisation Program.

Is the hepatitis B vaccine safe?

Yes. Hepatitis B vaccine is safe for newborn babies.

More than 90 per cent of newborns in Victoria receive the hepatitis B vaccine.

It does not affect breastfeeding and side effects are mild, like redness and swelling at the injection site.

What if my baby was born prematurely?

Babies born prematurely (less than 32 weeks gestation) or with a low birth weight (less than 2000 grams) are recommended to have an extra dose of the vaccine at 12 months of age to provide lasting protection.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a very infectious virus that affects the liver. Some adults can fight the infection and recover but for babies and young children, it can become a chronic (lifelong) illness that may cause liver disease and liver cancer.

Symptoms of hepatitis B include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Yellow skin and eyes

- Aching muscles or joints arthritis.

Babies and children under 5 years of age often do not show symptoms.

How is the hepatitis B virus spread?

Hepatitis B virus is very infectious and spreads through contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids.

Babies and children can catch the hepatitis B virus:

- during birth from a mother who has hepatitis B
- through bodily fluid from small skin breaks or mouth sores by a close contact with hepatitis B.

Many people don't know they have hepatitis B and spread it to others.

What if I am hepatitis B positive?

If you live with chronic hepatitis B your baby needs special care at birth. In addition to the hepatitis B vaccine, another medicine called 'hepatitis B immunoglobulin' is also recommended. These 2 injections provide extra protection for your baby against the hepatitis B virus. Both injections should be given within 12 hours of birth.

Remember – you and your baby will need regular check-ups with a hepatitis doctor.

Do I need to be tested for hepatitis B during pregnancy?

Yes. All women should be tested for hepatitis B infection during routine pregnancy check-ups. If you are pregnant and have hepatitis B, you should see a hepatitis doctor. You may need to take medicine that will reduce the chance of passing on the virus to your baby during birth.

For more information about the hepatitis B vaccine at birth, speak to your doctor, midwife or immunisation provider.

More information

- [MumBubVax](http://www.health.gov.au/news/mumbubvax-new-website-for-expectant-parents) <http://www.health.gov.au/news/mumbubvax-new-website-for-expectant-parents>
- [Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation](https://talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au/) (SKAI) <https://talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au/>
- [National Immunisation Program Schedule](https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/national-immunisation-program-schedule) <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/national-immunisation-program-schedule>
- [Better Health Channel: Hepatitis B – immunisation](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/hepatitis-b-immunisation) <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/hepatitis-b-immunisation>

For information about the hepatitis B vaccine at birth in another language, [visit Health Translations](https://healthtranslations.vic.gov.au) <https://healthtranslations.vic.gov.au>

You can also call the translation and interpreting service on 131 450.

To receive this document in another format, [email the Immunisation Team](mailto:immunisation@health.vic.gov.au) <immunisation@health.vic.gov.au>.

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