



Hepatitis B

how to protect your baby



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales

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how to protect your baby

Hepatitis B infection can be passed from mother to baby during birth. Most women will not know that they have the infection. This is why all pregnant women are now offered a blood test early in pregnancy to see if they have hepatitis B.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver. Many people with hepatitis B infection have no symptoms at all and do not know that they are infected. Others have 'flu-like symptoms and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice). In most cases hepatitis B infection can only be identified by a blood test.

Most adults infected with hepatitis B virus recover fully from the infection, but about 1 in 10 become carriers of the virus and can infect others. About 1 in 5 of these carriers develop serious liver disease later in life. Hepatitis B is different to hepatitis A, which is a more common cause of jaundice but does not lead to a life-long infection and rarely causes serious liver disease.



How can you get hepatitis B infection?

Hepatitis B virus is carried in the blood and body fluids. There are three main ways that infection is spread:

- From an infected mother to her baby during birth;
- By sexual intercourse with an infected person without a condom;
- By direct contact with the blood of an infected person e.g. by sharing toothbrushes and razors; from equipment used for tattooing and body piercing; and between drug users who share needles, syringes and other equipment.

The virus is not spread by normal day to day contact and activities e.g. coughing, sneezing, kissing, hugging, holding hands, sharing bathrooms and toilets or food, cups, cutlery, crockery and towels.

Why is hepatitis B infection serious for babies?

Without vaccination, many babies born to mothers who are hepatitis B carriers will become infected. As many as 9 out of 10 babies infected at birth develop long-lasting infection and these babies are at risk of developing serious liver disease as they grow older. If they become infected, their infection could be passed on to their close family and other contacts in the future.

Can my baby be protected from hepatitis B infection?

Yes. Your baby can be protected from infection by a full course of hepatitis B vaccine.

When should my baby have hepatitis B vaccine?

Your baby should have the first dose of vaccine soon after they are born. Your doctor or midwife will arrange this. Your baby will need further doses of vaccine for full protection against infection. Your family doctor or children's doctor should give these when your baby is 1, 2 and 12 months old.

You should be told where and when to get these injections before you leave hospital, and you should make sure that you know this.

Why it is important for a full course of vaccine to be given?

It is essential that your baby receives the full course of vaccine at the right ages for it to work.



Is hepatitis B vaccine safe?

The vaccine is very safe and millions of doses have been given to babies world-wide without serious side effects.

Are there any side effects?

In some babies, the site of the injection may become red and swollen, but this does not last for long.

Will it be safe to breastfeed my baby?

Yes - but your baby should still receive a full course of vaccine.

Will having hepatitis B infection affect my pregnancy and delivery?

No.

Could my partner and other children have hepatitis B?

The antenatal clinic will tell your family doctor that you have hepatitis B so that they can discuss this with you and your partner and arrange for hepatitis B testing and/or vaccination as necessary.

If you have concerns about other people finding out that you have hepatitis B infection, please discuss them with your midwife or doctor.

Do I need to see a doctor because of my hepatitis B infection?

The antenatal clinic or your family doctor should refer you to a specialist for assessment and advice about managing or treating your own infection. This will not be necessary until after you have had your baby.

If you have any other questions or concerns, talk to your doctor or midwife.

You can get more information about hepatitis B from:

Children's Liver Disease Foundation

36 Great Charles Street

Birmingham B3 3JY

Tel: 0121-212-3839

Fax: 0121-212-4300

E-mail: info@childliverdisease.org

Website: www.childliverdisease.org

(Specialises in children with liver disease)

The British Liver Trust

Ransomes Europark

Ipswich IP3 9QG

Tel: 0808-800-1000
(information line)

01473-276326

Fax: 01473-276327

E-mail: info@britishlivertrust.org.uk

Website: www.britishlivertrust.org.uk

(Specialises in adults with liver disease)

Further copies of this document can be
obtained from:

Public Health Division

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CF10 3NQ

Tel: 029 2080 1232

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