

# Protect Your Baby for Life

## Hepatitis B and Your Baby



### Why should pregnant women be concerned about Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that can be easily passed from a pregnant woman to her baby at birth. Fortunately, there is a vaccine to prevent babies from getting Hepatitis B.

### How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from a person with the Hepatitis B virus enter the body of someone who is not infected. The virus is very infectious and is easily spread to others. This can happen through:

- An infected mother passing it to her baby at birth
- Sex with an infected person
- Direct contact with blood from an infected person, even in tiny amounts too small to see

### What is Hepatitis B?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis B is a liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. Some people are able to fight the infection and clear the Hepatitis B virus. For others, the virus remains in their body and becomes a chronic, or lifelong, illness. Over time, Hepatitis B can cause serious health problems.

### How serious is Hepatitis B?

As many as 1 in 4 people with Hepatitis B develop serious liver problems including liver damage, liver failure, and even liver cancer. Every year, approximately 3,000 people in the United States die from Hepatitis B-related liver disease.

**Prevent Hepatitis B.  
Get your baby vaccinated.**

### How common is Hepatitis B?

It is estimated that 350 million people worldwide and 1.2 million people in the United States are infected with Hepatitis B. For every 1,000 pregnant women that give birth each year, 1 to 2 of them have Hepatitis B.

### Are babies at risk for Hepatitis B?

Yes. When a pregnant woman has Hepatitis B it can be spread easily to her baby. Babies and young children can also get Hepatitis B from close contact with family members or others who might be infected. Infants who become infected with Hepatitis B have a 90% chance of developing a lifelong, chronic infection.

### Are pregnant women tested for Hepatitis B?

Yes. Many women do not know they are infected, since people with Hepatitis B often have no symptoms. As a result, all pregnant women are given a blood test for Hepatitis B as part of their prenatal care. The test is usually performed during the first prenatal visit. If a woman has not received prenatal care, then she will be tested at the hospital before she delivers her baby.

### Why are women tested for Hepatitis B?

Pregnant women are routinely tested for Hepatitis B, along with other diseases. These tests are done to find health problems that can be prevented or treated in both a woman and her baby.





## Can Hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. A vaccine for Hepatitis B has been used for about 30 years. The vaccine has been recommended for infants beginning in 1991. Since then, experts believe that the vaccine has prevented more than half a million children in the United States from getting Hepatitis B.

## When does my baby get the first dose of the Hepatitis B vaccine?

CDC recommends that the first dose of vaccine be given to your baby before leaving the hospital.

## How many Hepatitis B doses does my baby need?

The vaccine is given as 3 or 4 shots, depending upon the brand of vaccine used. After the first shot is given in the hospital, the next shot is usually given at 1-2 months of age. The last shot is given between 6 months and 18 months of age. Ask your doctor when your baby needs to come back for the next shot in the series.



**CDC recommends that babies get the first dose of the Hepatitis B vaccine before leaving the hospital.**

## Why are these shots important?

Vaccines are one of the most important and effective ways to prevent diseases. Millions of babies have received Hepatitis B shots in the U.S. Experts believe that this vaccine has helped to reduce the number of children getting Hepatitis B by more than 90% over the last 20 years.

## For more information

Talk to your health professional, call your health department, or visit [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis).



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

*Division of Viral Hepatitis*

