

If my baby does not receive the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine, when can it be given?

The benefits of the birth dose can still be achieved if the hepatitis B vaccine is given within the first 7 days of life. If the vaccine is not given within this time frame, your baby may start the course of hepatitis B vaccines (in combination with other childhood vaccines) beginning at 2 months of age.

What if my baby is unwell?

Immunisation should only be postponed if a baby is very unwell or has a high temperature more than 38.5°C.

Will further booster doses be required?

At present, babies who have been fully immunised do not require booster doses of the vaccine.

Are there any side effects?

As with any type of medication, there is a chance that your baby may have a side effect from the vaccine. The most common side effects of the vaccine are minor and disappear quickly. These can include soreness at the injection site, mild fever and joint pain. Your baby may also be irritable or refuse feeds for a short time. Serious side effects from hepatitis B vaccine are rare.

If you are concerned about your baby after immunisation consult your midwife, doctor or immunisation nurse.

Where can I access more information?

- Speak to your doctor, midwife or immunisation nurse
- Immunisation Section, SA Health
Phone: 08 8226 7177
Website: www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs (click on 'Immunisation')
- Child and Youth Health 24 hour Parent Helpline Phone: 1300 364 100
Website: www.cyh.sa.gov.au
- National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance
Website: www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au

References

NHMRC, the Australian Immunisation Handbook 9th Edition, 2008

For more information

**Immunisation Section
SA Health
PO Box 6 Rundle Mall
Adelaide SA 5000
Telephone: (08) 8226 7177
www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs**

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call The Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

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Protect your baby



Why your infant needs protection against hepatitis B

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What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that can cause acute (short term) or chronic (long term) infection of the liver. 9 out of 10 children infected as babies remain persistently infected for many years (known as 'hepatitis B carriers') and can pass the virus on to others.

As many as 1 in 4 hepatitis B carriers may develop and suffer from cirrhosis of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure and death. Young children who contract the hepatitis B virus may have only mild or no symptoms at all so it is hard to diagnose.

How is hepatitis B spread?

The hepatitis B virus is found in infected body fluids including; blood, saliva, vaginal secretions, breast milk and semen. Babies of mothers with the hepatitis B virus are at a very high risk of becoming infected with the disease during delivery.

Hepatitis B virus can be spread by:

- breastfeeding;
- child-to-child – through open sores or wounds;
- infected mother to newborn – at or around the time of birth.

It can also be spread through sharing injecting equipment, needle-stick injury and contaminated instruments (such as those used for body piercing) or sexual contact.

Can hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. Immunisation with the hepatitis B vaccine provides protection in most cases (no vaccine is 100% effective). The hepatitis B vaccine is included on the childhood vaccination schedule as a long term prevention strategy to reduce the illness and death from complications due to the disease and to eventually eliminate hepatitis B from Australia.

Why do all newborn babies need to be immunised against hepatitis B at birth?

The birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine is recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council as the vaccine can prevent the:

- mother from infecting her baby if the mother is a hepatitis B carrier; or
- baby from contracting the disease from household members who are hepatitis B carriers.

Sometimes the mother does not know that she is a hepatitis B carrier because:

- the mother may not be tested for hepatitis B in pregnancy; or
- the mother may miss her second hepatitis B blood test – which should be taken closer to delivery (hepatitis B can take 1-15 months to show up in a blood test from day of infection); or
- the mother's blood test results are missing, inaccurate or may be recorded incorrectly.



How many doses of hepatitis B vaccine do babies receive?

With your consent, your baby will be given a dose of the hepatitis B vaccine before you leave hospital. Your baby will then be given 3 more doses within the first 12 months of life to be fully immunised.

Is it safe to give my newborn baby the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine?

Yes, the hepatitis B vaccine is safe to be given to a newborn.

The hepatitis B vaccine is not a live vaccine and provides protection without causing disease. It is produced in yeast cells and is free of animal or human blood products. There is no mercury in the vaccine. It does not interfere with breastfeeding.

Extensive experience shows that the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine is very well tolerated by newborn babies.

What if my baby is premature?

Premature babies are more at risk of developing infections and should be immunised at the recommended time. Babies born less than 32 weeks gestation or weighing less than 2,000gms at birth will need an extra dose of the vaccine. Your doctor or nurse should tell you if your baby will need an extra dose of hepatitis B vaccine.