

Your Health: Hepatitis B Shot



Vaccinations help protect you or your child from disease. They also help reduce the spread of disease to others and prevent epidemics.

The hepatitis B vaccine protects against infection with the hepatitis B virus (HBV). The vaccine works very well to protect against HBV infection if you receive all the doses (3 to 4 shots given at different times).

It is important to do everything you can to avoid getting HBV infection, because the virus can damage the liver and lead to liver cancer.

Who needs the hepatitis B vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for:

- All newborn babies and any child age 18 and younger who did not get this vaccine before.
- Adults ages 19 to 59 who have diabetes and have not had the shot before.
- Children who are adopted from countries where HBV infection is common.
- People who inject illegal drugs.

- People who have more than one sex partner or who have had a sexually transmitted disease.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Household contacts and sex partners of people who have hepatitis B.
- People who have blood-clotting disorders, such as hemophilia, and have received clotting factors from human donors.
- People who need to have their blood filtered through a machine (hemodialysis).
- People who have liver disease or are infected with HIV.
- Health care workers and public safety workers who are likely to be exposed to blood.
- Staff and residents of prisons or of institutions for the developmentally disabled.
- People who will spend more than 6 months in parts of the world where hepatitis B is common.

A mother who has the hepatitis B virus can pass it to her baby during delivery. If you are pregnant, get vaccinated if any of the following is true:

- You have had more than one sex partner during the last 6 months.
- You have ever injected illegal drugs.
- You have been treated for a sexually transmitted disease.
- Your partner has hepatitis B.

Who should not get the vaccine?

Talk to your doctor before getting a hepatitis B shot if:

- You are allergic to baker's yeast or any other ingredient in the vaccine.
- You have had a serious reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine.

- You are sick when a dose is scheduled. If you are sick, your doctor may want you to wait until you are well and then get the vaccine.

How many doses of the hepatitis B vaccine are needed?

Children

Infants should get the first hepatitis B shot at birth. The second shot is given at 1 to 2 months of age. The third shot usually is given when the child is 6 to 18 months old.

If your child is 18 years of age or younger and has not had the vaccine, he or she should get three shots over a period of 6 months.

Adults

The hepatitis B vaccination is given to adults in three doses. You receive the shots in your upper arm. You should get the second shot at least 1 month after the first one. The third shot usually is given about 6 months after the first one. The hepatitis B vaccine is safe for women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.

If you are exposed to the hepatitis B virus before you get all three shots, you may need a hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) shot. This gives you protection right away and will prevent infection until your hepatitis B vaccine takes effect.

What are the risks of getting vaccinated?

For most people, the hepatitis B vaccine is safe. Some people may have a few minor problems, such as a mild fever (under 100°F) or soreness where the shot was given. If you have fever or soreness:

- Try an over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Be sure to read and follow all instructions on the label. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 20. It has been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious illness.
- Put ice or a cold pack on the sore area for 10 to 15 minutes at a time. Be sure to put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.

Though it is rare, the vaccine could cause more serious problems. Talk to your doctor if you have questions or concerns.