

# Hepatitis B and Your Baby

## COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

### What Is hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus.
- Hepatitis B currently affects 250,000 Canadians.
- Many people who get hepatitis B never get sick; others may feel like they have “the flu” and their skin may turn yellow. A few may become severely ill and die.
- Most people get better after having the disease but some carry hepatitis B infection for the rest of their lives (i.e., carriers).
- About 10 of every 100 adults and **90 out of 100 babies** who get hepatitis B become carriers.
- People who become hepatitis B carriers can develop permanent liver damage and sometimes die.
- Hepatitis B is the number one cause of liver cancer in the world.

### How is hepatitis B spread?

- Nearly half of the people who get hepatitis B never feel sick. They can spread the disease without knowing it.
- Hepatitis B is spread when blood or body fluids from an infected person enter another person’s body through mucous membranes (mouth, nose, eyes, genitals) or breaks in the skin. Common ways that this can happen include:
  - during birth (from mother to baby);
  - living with others who have hepatitis B;
  - sharing toothbrushes or razors;

- having sex with an infected person;
- sharing needles and/or syringes during drug use; and
- ear or body piercing, or tattoos done with dirty (unsterilized) equipment.

### Can my baby get hepatitis B?

Your baby can get hepatitis B if you or someone you live with has hepatitis B.

### What can I do for my baby?

If you or someone you live with has hepatitis B, you can protect your baby by ensuring that he or she:

- gets two injections (needles or shots), as soon as possible after birth, and then
- gets two more shots by age six months.

### What injections will my baby get?

In the hospital your baby will get two shots:

- hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) and
- hepatitis B vaccine dose #1.

Hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) is given first. HBIG contains antibodies (from human blood). Antibodies are proteins that our immune system makes to fight germs. These antibodies protect your baby right away.

The second shot (hepatitis B vaccine) helps your baby’s body begin to make its own antibodies against hepatitis B.

After you leave the hospital your baby will need two more injections:

- hepatitis B vaccine dose #2 is given when your baby is one month old; and
- hepatitis B vaccine dose #3 is given when your baby is six months old.

These shots are usually given at your doctor's office, midwife's office or at a clinic. You do not have to pay for them.

After all four shots, more than 95 out of 100 babies will be protected from hepatitis B for life.

### Are these injections safe?

- HBIG is one of the safest products made from human blood. No spread of any viruses has been reported from getting this injection.
- Hepatitis B vaccine has safely been used in Canada since 1985. It is made from a product produced in yeast cells and not from blood products or living viruses.
- In Manitoba, thimerosal (a mercury-based product), is **no longer used** as a preservative in the hepatitis B vaccine given to babies.

### Will my baby have any side effects?

There are usually **no side effects**. Some children may have minor reactions. Severe reactions are rare.

Minor side effects include:

- redness, swelling or pain where the needle went in;
- feeling tired;
- mild fever that may be treated with acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol).

Serious side effects are very rare, but may include:

- allergic reactions;
- severe pain or swelling.

**If your baby has a serious reaction, report it to your doctor or nurse as soon as possible.**

### Will my baby need a blood test?

One month after your baby's last shot, your baby's doctor will do a simple blood test. This blood test will tell if your baby is protected from the hepatitis B virus.

### For more information

- Contact your doctor, public health nurse or Health Links in Winnipeg at 788-8200 or toll-free (outside Winnipeg only) 1-888-315-9257.
- Check out Health Canada's Web site: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/hcai-iamss/hepb\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/hcai-iamss/hepb_e.html). Another good information source is *Your Child's Best Shot: A Parent's Guide to Vaccination* (Dr. Ronald Gold, 2nd edition). This publication is available from the Canadian Pediatric Society (phone: 613-526-9397 fax: 613-526-3332).

*Information about the shots that you or your child receive may be recorded in the Manitoba Immunization Monitoring System (MIMS). This computerized database allows your doctor, your child's doctor or your public health nurse to find out what shots you or your child have had or need to have. Information collected in MIMS may be used to produce vaccination records, or notify you or your doctor if your child has missed a particular shot. Manitoba Health may use the information to monitor how well different vaccines work in preventing disease.*

*If you need information on the shots that you or your child has received, contact your local public health unit or nursing station.*

*Local Public Health Unit Stamp*

*This fact sheet was developed with the assistance of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority*