

## Hepatitis B Vaccine

**Keep your child safe.  
Get all shots on time.**

By getting all shots on time, your child can be protected from many diseases over a lifetime.

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

### What is hepatitis B vaccine?

Hepatitis B vaccine protects against the hepatitis B virus. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

### Who should get the vaccine?

Hepatitis B vaccine is provided free as part of your child's routine immunizations. The vaccine is given in Grade 6 as two doses or shots, four to six months apart.

The hepatitis B vaccine is also provided free to infants as part of their routine immunization. See BC HealthFile [#25c Hepatitis B Infant Vaccine](#) for more information.

Adults and those 16 years of age and older require three doses of the vaccine.

The vaccine is also provided free to children and adults at high risk of hepatitis B infection, including:

- Children under 7 years of age living with people at high risk of hepatitis B, such as intravenous drug users, men who have sex with men, or sex trade workers
- Children under 12 years of age whose families have emigrated from areas with high rates of hepatitis B

- Children who live with a person with hepatitis B
- Sexual partners of someone with hepatitis B
- Males who have sexual contact with other males
- Injection drug users and their sexual partners
- Those who share drug snorting, smoking, or injecting equipment
- Those with many sexual partners or a recent sexually transmitted infection
- Those with chronic liver disease, hepatitis C, or a liver transplant
- Those with chronic kidney disease including predialysis, hemodialysis, or peritoneal dialysis patients
- Those who have received a kidney or stem cell transplant
- Those who have hemophilia or are receiving repeated infusions of blood or blood products
- Inmates of a correctional facility
- Students training in a health care profession who may have contact with blood and body fluids
- Teachers, staff and students in a childcare setting attended by a child with hepatitis B, whose behaviour or medical condition increases the chances of exposure to that child's blood or body fluids
- Staff or residents in a community group home for the developmentally challenged.

If you are not eligible for a free vaccine, speak with your doctor or public health unit about buying the vaccine. It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

### Benefits of the Vaccine

The hepatitis B vaccine is the best way to protect against hepatitis B infection and its complications, including permanent liver

damage, which can lead to liver cancer and death. When you get vaccinated, you help protect others as well.

## Possible Reactions after the Vaccine

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get hepatitis B.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the shot was given. Some may experience a mild fever.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol® can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 911 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine.

**Report serious or unexpected reactions to your public health nurse or doctor.**

## Who should not get the vaccine?

Speak with a public health nurse or doctor if you have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis B vaccine, or any component of the vaccine including yeast, or to latex.

## What is hepatitis B infection?

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It can cause serious health concerns including permanent liver damage (cirrhosis). Hepatitis B is also the main cause of liver cancer, which can be fatal. Hepatitis B virus is spread from one infected person to another by contact with blood or body fluids, such as an accidental poke with a used needle, intimate sexual

contact, being splashed in the mouth, nose, or eyes with infected blood, being bitten by an infected person or by sharing blood-contaminated items such as a toothbrush, dental floss or razor. Mothers infected with hepatitis B virus can pass the virus to their newborn babies during delivery.

After the virus enters your body, it usually takes two to three months to develop signs of illness. Many people who get hepatitis B show no symptoms and may not know they have the disease. Whether there are signs of illness or not, you can pass the virus on to others.

## Mature Minor Consent

Effort is made to seek parental or guardian consent prior to immunization. Children under the age of 19 who are able to understand the risks and benefits may consent to or refuse immunizations, regardless of the parent's or guardian's wishes. It is recommended that parents/guardians and their minor children discuss immunizations beforehand, and ask the nurse or doctor any questions.

For more BC HealthFile topics visit [www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm), or visit your local public health unit.

Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

Visit BC HealthGuide OnLine – a world of health information you can trust at [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org)