



Hepatitis B

Vaccination

Hepatitis B Immunisation

People at increased risk of contracting hepatitis B should be immunised. For example; health care workers, prison officers, partners and contacts of an infected person or injecting drug users who share needles. Don't forget, after being immunised you need a blood test to check that it has worked.

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). The disease mainly affects the liver. However, if you are infected the virus is present in body fluids such as blood, saliva, semen and vaginal fluid. In the UK it is estimated that about 1 in 1000 people are infected with the hepatitis B virus.

If you are infected with the hepatitis B virus, the initial symptoms can range from no symptoms at all to a severe illness. After this 'acute phase', in a number of cases the virus remains in the body long term. These people are called 'carriers'. They may not have any symptoms but can still pass on the virus to other people. About 1 in 4 carriers eventually develop a serious liver disease such as chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis, and in some cases liver cancer develops after a number of years.

Symptoms of hepatitis B include

- **Fever**
- **Dark urine**
- **Pale poo**
- **Nausea & vomiting**
- **Joint pain**
- **Hives**
- **Headache**
- **Weakness/fatigue**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Jaundice**
- **Pain in the right side of abdomen**

Who needs Hepatitis B immunisation?

Anyone who is at increased risk of being infected with the virus should consider being immunised. These include:

- Workers who are likely to come into contact with blood products, or are at increased risk of needlestick injuries, assault, etc. For example: nurses, doctors, dentists, medical laboratory workers, prison wardens, etc.
- Injecting drug users who share needles.
- People who change sexual partners frequently.
- Travellers to countries where hepatitis B is common.
- Newborn babies of infected mothers.
- Sexual partners of an infected person.
- Children and household members of an infected person. You cannot catch hepatitis B from touching people or just normal social contact. So, household visitors and friends are not usually at risk. But close regular contacts are best immunised.

How is Hepatitis B passed on?

The hepatitis B virus is passed on from person to person as a result of:

- Blood to blood contact. For example, from; needles or other medical equipment that is contaminated with infected blood, infected blood being spilt onto a wound, etc. (Blood used for transfusion is tested for hepatitis B virus and so is not now a cause of infection.)
- Having sex with an infected person.
- From an infected mother passing it to her baby.
- A human bite from an infected person.

The immunisation schedule

- You need three doses of the vaccine for full protection. The second dose is usually given one month after the first dose. The third dose is given one month after the second dose.
- 6 to 8 weeks after the third dose you will need to have a blood test. This checks if you have made antibodies against the hepatitis B virus and are immune. This is because, in some people, three doses of the vaccine are not sufficient and further doses are needed. If following a full course, immunity is not gained a further full course is recommended. If low immunity is gained a booster is required immediately but no further blood test is required.
- Once you are immunised (and have been confirmed that you are immune with a blood test), it is thought that you remain immune for life.
- As far as possible it is important that the vaccines are given on, or close to, the due date. However, there is no need to restart the vaccination programme if a previous course has been partly completed, irrespective of how long ago.



Are there any side-effects from Hepatitis B immunisation?

Side-effects are uncommon. Occasionally, some people develop soreness and redness at the injection site. Rarely, some people develop a mild fever and a flu-like illness for a few days after the injection. This usually goes away without any consequence. Very rarely, individuals react unfavourably to vaccines and become acutely unwell, often requiring intensive treatment in hospital. If you have any allergies or have had any unpleasant reactions to any vaccines or medicines in the past then notify the nurse or doctor before you have the vaccination.

What if I come into contact with Hepatitis B and am not immunised?

Seek medical attention as soon as possible if you feel that you have been at risk from a possible source of infection and you are not immunised. For example, if you have a needlestick injury or have been bitten by somebody who may have hepatitis B, etc. You should have an injection of immunoglobulin as soon as possible. This contains antibodies against the virus and gives short-term protection. You should also start a course of immunisation.

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