

# Hepatitis B Vaccine

## What is Hepatitis B? How common is it?

Hepatitis B is caused by a virus spread through contact with blood or bodily fluids of an infected person. This includes mother-to-child transmission, needle stick, sharing needles, or having unprotected sexual intercourse. Approximately 80,000 people per year are infected in the United States.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can occur 45-160 days after someone is exposed to the virus. These include: vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, fatigue, muscle and joint pains, rashes, and jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and/or skin). Many infected people have no symptoms at all. Standard blood tests will help in the diagnosis. Specialized blood test can confirm hepatitis A infection.

### SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS:

## What are the complications?

Most people with hepatitis B recover completely within 3 months. In others, the virus may cause a more severe infection or become chronic, over the years causing liver scarring (cirrhosis) and other complications. It is not clear why one person completely recovers while another develops a chronic infection, but the age at which infection occurs can affect chance of recovery: newborns run a 90-95% risk of becoming chronically infected, while the risk decreases with increasing age. People with other underlying liver disease also have a higher risk of complications.

## Hepatitis B vaccination

The vaccine preparations available in the United States contain a purified part of the virus protein. It cannot cause infection and is very safe. A series of 3 injections is necessary to ensure one develops protection against the virus. In newborns born to an infected mother, combining the hepatitis B vaccine with another medication called Hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG) has been shown to dramatically decrease the risk of chronic infection.

## Who should get vaccinated?

Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all children through 18 years of age. It is especially important for those...

- ◆ With chronic liver problems.
- ◆ Infants born to infected mothers
- ◆ Living with someone who has Hepatitis B
- ◆ Who may be exposed to Hepatitis B at work
- ◆ With more than 1 sex partner



## Is the vaccine well tolerated?

**Yes.** Most people have no reactions, except mild soreness at the site of the injection. In others, however, more severe allergic reactions can occur, requiring that the vaccination be discontinued.

For more information or to locate a pediatric gastroenterologist in your area please visit our website at: [www.naspgghan.org](http://www.naspgghan.org)

**IMPORTANT REMINDER:** This information from the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) is intended only to provide general information and not as a definitive basis for diagnosis or treatment in any particular case. It is very important that you consult your doctor about your specific condition.

