

Hepatitis B (Hep B) vaccine



FACTS

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. There are around 150 new cases of hepatitis B reported each year in Ontario.

There is no treatment. Most people get well, but about 10 per cent will carry the virus for life and keep infecting other people. Some people will continue to have liver problems for the rest of their lives. Serious liver disease from hepatitis B virus can lead to liver cancer and even death.

How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread through contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person. In Canada, hepatitis B is mainly spread through unprotected sexual contact.

It can also be spread through body/ear piercing or tattooing with infected equipment, through sharing used needles, or from an infected mother to her child at birth.

What are the symptoms of the disease?

People with hepatitis B often become tired, feverish, lose their appetite, have abdominal pain, vomiting and/or diarrhea. They may have pale greyish stools or very dark urine.

Sometimes they get yellow skin and eyes (called “jaundice”).

Why should my child be vaccinated?

1. Effective: The hepatitis B vaccine is very effective. Two doses of hepatitis B vaccine will protect 98 per cent or more of children (ages 11-15).

2. No symptoms: Some people with hepatitis B do not have any symptoms. These people may infect others without knowing it.

3. Teenagers and young adults: The teenage years and early adulthood are times when young people are more likely to participate in activities that increase the risk of infection. For this reason, it is important that children get the vaccine before this stage.

4. Careers and schools: Many different careers, school programs, and workplaces require proof of these vaccinations.

Who should **not** get the hepatitis B vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine should **not** be given to anyone who has:

- had an allergic reaction in the past to hepatitis B vaccine or a combined hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine (e.g., Twinrix®)
- an allergy to any component of the vaccine including aluminum hydroxide or aluminum hydroxyphosphate, 2-phenoxyethanol, or yeast
- a high fever or a serious infection worse than a cold on the day of the school clinic

Is the hepatitis B vaccine safe?

The hepatitis B vaccine is very safe. The most frequent side effect is mild soreness, swelling and redness at the site where the vaccine is given. Some people get a mild fever (no greater than 37.7°C). Side effects go away after a day or two. Serious side effects are rare.

What if I decide not to vaccinate?

The hepatitis B vaccine is not required by law. However, your child will be at risk of getting hepatitis B if you decide not to vaccinate.