

Hepatitis B Vaccine

Public Health - Factsheet for Parents & Guardians

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention¹. Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. The liver is a very important organ that is responsible for carrying out a number of vital functions. Hepatitis B can be spread from person to person from cuts or bites, from sharing personal care items such as a toothbrush and from direct contact with body fluid (e.g. blood) from someone who is infected with hepatitis B. Your child cannot catch the virus from sneezes, coughs or hugs.

Signs and symptoms of hepatitis B may include fever, stomach pain, tiredness, loss of appetite and jaundice (yellow skin and eyes) that may last for weeks or months. Almost all children who are infected with hepatitis B do not experience any of these signs or symptoms until after the liver is already severely damaged.

Most people that are infected with hepatitis B recover in 4 to 8 weeks but some people can carry the virus for the rest of their lives. The younger a person is when infected with hepatitis B, the more likely it is that they will be infected for life. If the virus does not go away on its own, it can go on to cause permanent liver damage, including cancer and liver failure.

What is the hepatitis B vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine is approved by Health Canada and protects against hepatitis B. There are other types of hepatitis that are caused by other viruses, such as hepatitis A and hepatitis C. The hepatitis B vaccine will only protect your child against hepatitis B.

When the hepatitis B vaccine is provided as part of Manitoba's routine childhood immunization schedule, it is over 95% effective in preventing infection for at least 30 years.

Why should my child get the hepatitis B vaccine?

All children should be immunized against hepatitis B. Immunization is the best way to protect your child against the hepatitis B virus that can be serious and sometimes fatal.

Vaccines help prepare your body to fight potential future exposure to the virus by getting your immune system ready.

The vaccine helps to protect you, your family, and other people in your community.

Possible side effects of the hepatitis B vaccine

It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get hepatitis B. Health Canada approves vaccines based on a review of quality and safety.

Common reactions to the vaccine include soreness, redness, pain or swelling where the vaccine was given. Some children may have fever, drowsiness, dizziness, or an upset stomach. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra® or generic versions) can be given for fever or soreness.

Acetylsalicylic acid (ASA - Aspirin® or generic versions) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty breathing or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. **Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department or health centre for immediate attention should any reaction occur after leaving the clinic.**

Report any serious or unexpected side-effects to a health care provider.

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada

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Who should get the hepatitis B vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine is offered free-of-charge as part of Manitoba's routine childhood immunization schedule in Grade 6.

The hepatitis B vaccine works best when it is given before your child comes into contact with the virus.

Public health nurses provide the hepatitis B vaccine in schools. If your child misses one or more doses at school, or has an immune-compromising condition, please speak with your health care provider.

The hepatitis B vaccine is given as a series of 2 or more doses over a few months, as per the routine childhood immunization schedule. The recommended number of doses depends on the age of the child when first immunized as well as the vaccine product used. For the best protection against the hepatitis B virus, it is very important for your child to get all of the doses in the series.

The hepatitis B vaccine is especially important for your child if he/she is:

- a household contact, friend and/or family member of a person who has hepatitis B;
- living with a health condition that affects his/her liver or kidneys;
- living with an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment;
- a recipient of, or awaiting, stem cell or solid organ transplant; or,
- travelling to areas where hepatitis B is common.

Who should NOT get the hepatitis B vaccine?

If your child has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of any vaccine or to any of the contents of the hepatitis B vaccine (e.g. yeast), you should speak with your child's health care provider.

There is no need to delay immunization because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you are concerned, speak with a health care provider.

Your record of protection

Make sure your immunization provider updates your child's immunization record card, after he/she receives an immunization. Keep the card in a safe place!

Your child's immunizations will be recorded in Manitoba's immunization registry. This registry:

- allows the health care provider to find out which immunizations your child has had or needs to have;
- may be used to produce immunization records, or notify you or your health care provider if a particular immunization has been missed; and,
- allows Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living and public health officials to monitor how well vaccines work in preventing disease.

If you need information on the immunizations that your child has received, contact your health care provider.

The Personal Health Information Act protects your child's information. You can have your child's personal health information hidden from view from health care providers. For additional information, please contact your local public health office to speak with a public health nurse.

For a listing of public health offices, please visit:
www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html.

For more information on hepatitis B or the hepatitis B vaccine:

Talk to your health care provider.

Call Health Links—Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257

Or, visit:

- **Manitoba's Immunization Program website:**
www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/index.html
- **Government of Canada website:**
<http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/healthy-living-vie-saine/immunization-immunisation/index-eng.php>

Please visit the Vaccine Factsheets and Resources webpage for the most current factsheet:

www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/vaccines.html