

# Hepatitis B vaccination at birth

Information for pregnant women



The hepatitis B vaccine  
can protect your baby from  
life-long illness, serious liver  
disease and liver cancer.

# Why does my baby need hepatitis B vaccine at birth?

The vaccine is recommended within 24 hours of birth to:

- prevent the spread from a mother to her baby, or from an infected person in close contact
- reduce the risk of your baby developing chronic hepatitis B.

The vaccine can also be given within the first 7 days of life. For lasting protection additional doses are given as part of the routine infant immunisation schedule.

The vaccine is free of charge under the National Immunisation Program.



## Is the hepatitis B vaccine safe?

**Yes.** Hepatitis B vaccine is safe for newborn babies.

More than 90 per cent of newborns in Victoria receive the hepatitis B vaccine.

It does not affect breastfeeding and side effects are mild, like redness and swelling at the injection site.

## What if my baby was born prematurely?

Babies born prematurely (less than 32 weeks gestation) or with a low birth weight (less than 2000 grams) are recommended to have an extra dose of the vaccine at 12 months of age to provide lasting protection.

## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a very infectious virus that affects the liver. Some adults can fight the infection and recover but for babies and young children, it can become a chronic (lifelong) illness that may cause liver disease and liver cancer.

Symptoms of hepatitis B include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Yellow skin and eyes
- Aching muscles or joints arthritis.

Babies and children under 5 years of age often do not show symptoms.

## How is the hepatitis B virus spread?

Hepatitis B virus is very infectious and spreads through contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids.

Babies and children can catch the hepatitis B virus:

- during birth from a mother who has hepatitis B
- through bodily fluid from small skin breaks or mouth sores by a close contact with hepatitis B.

Many people don't know they have hepatitis B and spread it to others.

## What if I am Hepatitis B positive?

If you live with chronic hepatitis B your baby needs special care at birth. In addition to the hepatitis B vaccine, another medicine called 'hepatitis B immunoglobulin' is also recommended. These 2 injections provide extra protection for your baby against the hepatitis B virus. Both injections should be given within 12 hours of birth.

**Remember – you and your baby will need regular check-ups with a hepatitis doctor.**

## Do I need to be tested for hepatitis B during pregnancy?

**Yes.** All women should be tested for hepatitis B infection during routine pregnancy check-ups. If you are pregnant and have hepatitis B, you

should see a hepatitis doctor. You may need to take medicine that will reduce the chance of passing on the virus to your baby during birth.

**For more information about the hepatitis B vaccine at birth, speak to your doctor, midwife or immunisation provider.**

## More information

- MumBubVax <<http://www.health.gov.au/news/mumbubvax-new-website-for-expectant-parents>>
- Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation (SKAI) <<https://talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au/>>
- National Immunisation Program Schedule <<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/national-immunisation-program-schedule>>
- Better Health Channel: Hepatitis B – immunisation <<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/hepatitis-b-immunisation>>

For information about the hepatitis B vaccine at birth in another language, visit Health Translations

<<https://healthtranslations.vic.gov.au>>

You can also call the translation and interpreting service on **131 450**.

To receive this document in another format, email the Immunisation Team <[immunisation@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:immunisation@health.vic.gov.au)>.

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