



Hepatitis B Vaccine

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is caused by a virus that affects the liver and can cause permanent damage. It is the biggest cause of liver cancer worldwide. The liver is needed to digest food and remove waste from the body. People with the disease often become tired, feverish, lose their appetite and sometimes get yellow skin and eyes (called jaundice). However, some people can get the virus and not have any symptoms. This means that they can infect someone else and not know it. Therefore, it is important to get immunized. You can get hepatitis B through the blood and other body fluids from an infected person. It is primarily a sexually transmitted disease, but you can also pick it up through used needles and through body/ear piercing or tattooing with dirty equipment. An infected mother can pass it to her child at birth. Health care and emergency service workers can get it from needle stick injuries and blood splashes in the eyes, nose or mouth or on broken skin. You cannot get hepatitis B from someone coughing, from hugging or from using the same dishes.

Is there a cure?

There is not a cure for hepatitis B. 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.

Can hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. Hepatitis B can be prevented with a series of hepatitis B vaccine. The vaccine is given by a needle into the muscle of the leg or arm. The most common schedule consists of 3 doses of vaccine given over a 6-month period. The first dose is given; one month later, the second dose is given; five months later, the third dose is given. **A two-dose schedule for 11 to 15 year olds is used for Grade 7 students.** The first dose is given and the second dose is given 4 to 6 months later.

Is the vaccine safe?

The vaccine is safe. It has been used in Canada for many years and is one of the safest vaccines around. It may cause minor side effects such as redness, soreness or slight swelling where the needle went in. Some people may be achy, have a headache and/or a fever for a day or so. Severe reactions are rare.

When should I call my doctor/nurse practitioner?

Call your doctor/nurse practitioner or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if any of the following symptoms develop within 3 days of getting the shot:

- hives
- swelling of the face or mouth
- trouble breathing
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness
- high fever (over 40°C or 104°F)
- convulsions or seizures
- other serious problem

Who should not receive the vaccine?

The risk from hepatitis B is much greater than any risk from the vaccine. However, some people should not have this vaccine. These include:

- anyone who had an allergic reaction to the vaccine or any component of the vaccine (aluminum, yeast)
- anyone with a fever or an infection more serious than a cold – the vaccine should be rescheduled when these symptoms resolve

You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your doctor/nurse practitioner or call the local health unit.

Who should I talk to if I have any more questions?

Talk to your doctor/nurse practitioner or call Renfrew County and District Health Unit Health Info Line at 613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097 Ext. 666.

Your record of protection

After you get any immunization, make sure your personal immunization record (Yellow Card) is updated. Keep it in a safe place!

Renfrew County and District Health Unit

7 International Drive
Pembroke, Ontario K8A 6W5
613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097, Ext. 666.

Adapted from the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care Hepatitis B Fact Sheet, March 2002; Engerix®- B Product Monograph (Aug 9, 2013); Recombivax HB® Product Monograph (May 15, 2012).

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