

## If my baby does not receive the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine, when can it be given?

The benefits of the birth dose can still be achieved if the hepatitis B vaccine is given within the first 7 days of life. If the vaccine is not given within this time frame, your baby may start the course of hepatitis B vaccines (in combination with other childhood vaccines) beginning at 6 to 8 weeks of age.

## What if my baby is unwell?

Immunisation should only be postponed if a baby is very unwell or has a high temperature more than 38.5°C.

## Will further booster doses be required?

At present, babies who have been fully immunised do not require booster doses of the vaccine.

## Are there any side effects?

As with any type of medication, there is a chance that your baby may have a side effect from the vaccine. The most common side effects of the vaccine are minor and disappear quickly. These can include soreness at the injection site, mild fever and joint pain. Your baby may also be irritable or refuse feeds for a short time. Serious side effects from hepatitis B vaccine are rare.

If you are concerned about your baby after immunisation consult your midwife, doctor or immunisation nurse.

## Where can I access more information?

- Speak to your doctor, midwife or immunisation nurse
- Immunisation Section, SA Health  
Phone: 1300 232 272  
Website: [www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs)  
(click on 'Immunisation')
- Child and Youth Health 24 hour Parent Helpline Phone: 1300 364 100  
Website: [www.cyh.sa.gov.au](http://www.cyh.sa.gov.au)
- National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance  
Website: [www.ncirs.edu.au](http://www.ncirs.edu.au)

## References

NHMRC, the Australian Immunisation Handbook 9th Edition, 2008

## For more information

**Immunisation Section  
SA Health  
PO Box 6 Rundle Mall  
Adelaide SA 5000  
Telephone: 1300 232 272  
[www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs)**

If you require this information in an alternative language or format please contact SA Health on the details provided above and they will make every effort to assist you.



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# Protect your baby



## Why your infant needs protection against hepatitis B

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## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that can cause acute (short term) or chronic (long term) infection of the liver. 9 out of 10 children infected as babies remain persistently infected for many years (known as 'hepatitis B carriers') and can pass the virus on to others.

As many as 1 in 4 hepatitis B carriers may develop and suffer from cirrhosis of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure and death. Young children who contract the hepatitis B virus may have only mild or no symptoms at all so it is hard to diagnose.

## How is hepatitis B spread?

The hepatitis B virus is found in infected body fluids including; blood, saliva, vaginal secretions, breast milk and semen. Babies of mothers with the hepatitis B virus are at a very high risk of becoming infected with the disease during delivery.

Hepatitis B virus can be spread by:

- breastfeeding;
- child-to-child – through open sores or wounds;
- infected mother to newborn – at or around the time of birth.

It can also be spread through sharing injecting equipment, needle-stick injury and contaminated instruments (such as those used for body piercing) or sexual contact.

## Can hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. Immunisation with the hepatitis B vaccine provides protection in most cases (no vaccine is 100% effective). The hepatitis B vaccine is included on the childhood vaccination schedule as a long term prevention strategy to reduce the illness and death from complications due to the disease and to eventually eliminate hepatitis B from Australia.

## Why do all newborn babies need to be immunised against hepatitis B at birth?

The birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine is recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council as the vaccine can prevent the:

- mother from infecting her baby if the mother is a hepatitis B carrier; or
- baby from contracting the disease from household members who are hepatitis B carriers.

Sometimes the mother does not know that she is a hepatitis B carrier because:

- the mother may not be tested for hepatitis B in pregnancy; or
- the mother may be exposed to hepatitis B after her blood test taken in early pregnancy. It may be 4-6 weeks before hepatitis B is detected in a blood test and symptoms may take between 45-180 days to appear following infection; or
- the mother's blood test results are missing, inaccurate or may be recorded incorrectly.



## How many doses of hepatitis B vaccine do babies receive?

With your consent, your baby will be given a dose of the hepatitis B vaccine before you leave hospital. Your baby will then be given 3 more doses within the first 12 months of life to be fully immunised.

## Is it safe to give my newborn baby the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine?

Yes, the hepatitis B vaccine is safe to be given to a newborn.

The hepatitis B vaccine is not a live vaccine and provides protection without causing disease. It is produced in yeast cells and is free of animal or human blood products. There is no mercury in the vaccine. It does not interfere with breastfeeding.

Extensive experience shows that the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine is very well tolerated by newborn babies.

## What if my baby is premature?

Premature babies are more at risk of developing infections and should be immunised at the recommended time. Babies born less than 32 weeks gestation or weighing less than 2,000gms at birth will need an extra dose of the vaccine at 12 months of age. Your doctor or nurse should tell you if your baby will need an extra dose of hepatitis B vaccine.