

How long does the protection last for my baby?

There is good evidence to show that babies who have been fully immunised against hepatitis B will have long-lasting protection.

Are there any side effects to the vaccine?

The birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine is very well tolerated by newborn babies and does not interfere with breast feeding. Serious side effects are very rare.

If you are concerned talk to your midwife, doctor or immunisation provider.



References:

Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health, Canberra, 2018, immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC) Hepatitis B Questions and Answers for the Public. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/bfaq.htm>

Hepatitis Australia; <https://www.hepatitisaustralia.com/Pages/Category/hepatitis-b>

Hepatitis B vaccination at birth

Why your baby needs it



Government
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SA Health

For more information

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What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a very common liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus. The illness may be mild and last for a few weeks or can be serious and require treatment in hospital.

Symptoms of hepatitis B include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, yellow skin and eyes, aching muscles and joints and arthritis.

Not all people who are infected develop symptoms. Children less than five, especially those less than one year of age, generally do not show symptoms of infection.

Some people, especially adults, can fight the infection and recover but others, especially babies and young children, may not clear the infection.

Hepatitis B infection that remains after six months is called chronic hepatitis B, which is life-long.

The younger a person is when they become infected, the more likely they are to develop chronic hepatitis B.

Chronic hepatitis B can lead to liver cancer and liver failure later in life.

9 out of 10 infants infected at less than one year of age will develop chronic hepatitis B infection and usually remain infectious for life.

How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread through contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids.

Babies and children can get hepatitis B:

- > during birth from an infected mother
- > through household or other close personal contact with an infected person
- > through minor skin or mucous membrane breaks or contact between open sores or wounds (eg child to child)
- > through sharing personal items used by an infected person (eg toothbrush)

People infected with hepatitis B can transmit the virus even if they do not develop any symptoms. This means that many people with hepatitis B do not know they have the virus because they do not feel sick, but they can still spread the virus to others.

The hepatitis B virus can survive outside the body for up to seven days and can be spread through contact with infected blood, even it has already dried.

How can I protect my baby from hepatitis B?

You can protect your baby from birth with a safe and effective hepatitis B vaccine.

This vaccine has been given to children in Australia and around the world for many years. It is very effective and provides protection in most cases. No vaccine is 100% effective.



Why do all newborns need the hepatitis B vaccine before they leave hospital?

In Australia all newborn babies are recommended to have hepatitis B vaccine, preferably within 24 hours of birth.

This timing provides the best protection for all babies, including those who may have contracted the virus from the mother during birth. The birth dose also helps protect babies from hepatitis B virus until they are old enough to receive hepatitis B vaccine with the routine childhood immunisations at six weeks of age.

Many people don't know they have the hepatitis B virus but can still spread it to others.

What if my baby does not receive the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine?

If the vaccine is not given within 24 hours of birth, it can still be given up to 7 days of age.

If your baby did not have the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine in the first 7 days, they should commence their routine childhood immunisations at six weeks of age to provide protection as early as possible.

How many doses of the hepatitis B vaccine does my baby need?

With your consent, your baby will receive one dose of hepatitis B vaccine, preferably within 24 hours of birth.

Your baby should then receive three more doses of hepatitis B vaccine in a combination vaccine at six weeks, four and six months of age as part of their childhood immunisation schedule.

Premature babies born less than 32 weeks gestation or weighing less than 2000 grams at birth will need an extra dose at 12 months of age. Ask your doctor or nurse if you think your baby will need an extra dose of hepatitis B vaccine.