

Hepatitis B

About the Vaccine for Hepatitis B Virus

A vaccine is a shot of inactive virus that stimulates your natural immune system. After you get the hepatitis B vaccine, your body will make antibodies that will protect you against the virus. These antibodies are stored in your body for several years and will fight off the hepatitis B virus if you are exposed to it.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis B.

Who should get the hepatitis B vaccine?

You may need the hepatitis B vaccine if you

- have a chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis C;
- live in or were born in areas where hepatitis B is common;
- inject drugs;
- have a sex partner who has hepatitis B or have multiple sex partners;
- are a man who has sex with other men;
- share a household with someone who has hepatitis B;
- work in a high-risk profession, especially if you are a health care worker, emergency worker, police officer, firefighter, mortician, or work in the military;
- are an international traveler;
- are in prison;
- receive blood products or are on hemodialysis.

Certain ethnic groups have higher rates of hepatitis B virus infection. You may need the vaccine if you are African-American, Latino, Native American, Haitian, Alaskan Native, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, or Filipino.



How is the vaccine given?

For both children and adults, the vaccine should be given as three shots. The vaccine is given as follows: a single shot, followed by a second injection one month later, and then a third shot six months later. People who are infected with another virus, such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), or who have problems with their immune system, may need larger doses of the hepatitis B vaccine.

Babies born to infected mothers should get the first shot within 12 hours after birth, followed by a second shot one month later, and the third shot six months later. Babies born to mothers who are not infected with the hepatitis B virus should get the first shot within one to two months after birth, and the second shot a month later, and the third shot six months later.

You will NOT get hepatitis B from the vaccine.

What if I do not get all the shots on time?

If you are not able to get the shots on time, the vaccine may still work if you get your second and third shots at least two months apart from each other. Ask your doctor for more information.

How long will I be protected after I get the shots?

You will be protected for about 13 years. If it has been many years since you received your hepatitis B vaccine, or if you do not know when you were vaccinated, ask your doctor to check to see if you have antibodies against hepatitis B.

What if I am exposed to the hepatitis B virus? Is there something I can take?

If you know you were recently exposed to the hepatitis B virus, you may get protection from a shot of hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG) within 24 hours after your exposure. This will protect you for three to six months, but it is also strongly recommended that you begin the three-shot hepatitis B vaccine series, starting within seven days of your exposure.

What are the side effects of the hepatitis B vaccine?

There are very few side effects, the most common being soreness where you got the shot. You will NOT get hepatitis B from the vaccine. Pregnant women have received the hepatitis B vaccine with no risk to the baby.

Can I get the hepatitis B vaccine at VA?

Yes, speak with your VA health care provider to see if you should be vaccinated against hepatitis B.

Who can I contact for more information?

Call your local VA medical center and visit the Veterans Affairs Hepatitis C Web site at <http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>

Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hepatitis Toll-Free Information Line at 1-888-4 HEPCDC (1-888-443-7232) and visit the Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis>

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*Public Health Strategic Health Care Group (13B)
Veterans Health Administration
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420
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