

## **Hepatitis B Shots Are Recommended for All New Babies.**

### **Hepatitis B Vaccine Helps Protect Your Baby's Future!**

#### **What is hepatitis B and why do I need to protect my baby now?**

Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. The virus can enter the bloodstream, attack the liver, and cause serious damage. When babies get infected, the virus usually remains in the body for a lifetime (this is called chronic hepatitis B). About 1 out of 4 infected babies will die of liver failure or liver cancer as adults. Hepatitis B is a deadly disease – but it's preventable with vaccination.

#### **How is hepatitis B virus spread?**

Anyone can become infected with hepatitis B virus at any time during their lives. Hepatitis B virus is spread by contact with an infected person's blood or certain body fluids. For example, babies can get hepatitis B virus from their infected mothers at birth, and children can get it if they live with or are cared for by an infected person, or even if they share personal care items (e.g., toothbrush) with an infected person.

Currently, about 1 out of 172 people in the United States have been infected with the hepatitis B virus.

#### **How many people have hepatitis B?**

In the United States, tens of thousands of people get infected with the hepatitis B virus each year. About one million people in the U.S. are already infected. Every year, about

4,000 Americans die from liver failure or liver cancer caused by hepatitis B. Worldwide, 257 million people are infected.

It is impossible to know if a person is infected with the hepatitis B virus by looking at them. Most people have no symptoms, do not feel sick, and don't know they are infected. As a result, they can spread the virus to others without knowing it. The only way to know if a person is infected is with a blood test.

#### **Is there a cure for hepatitis B?**

No. Although there are several medicines to help people who have life-long hepatitis B virus infection, there is no medicine that "cures" it. The good news is that hepatitis B can be prevented by vaccination.

#### **Who recommends that all babies get hepatitis B vaccinations at birth?**

Medical groups such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that every baby get hepatitis B vaccine within the first 24 hours of birth. These are the same groups that recommend babies get vaccinated against whooping cough (pertussis), measles, tetanus, polio, and other serious diseases.

#### **Why does my baby need a hepatitis B shot at birth?**

It is important to vaccinate babies at birth so they will be protected as early as possible from any exposure to the hepatitis B virus. Babies and young children are not able to fight off hepatitis B virus infection as well as older people.

A baby who gets infected with the hepatitis B virus during the first five years of life has a 15% to 25% risk for pre-mature death from liver disease, including liver failure or liver cancer. Hepatitis B vaccine is your baby's "insurance policy" against being infected with the hepatitis B virus.

Experts recommend vaccination against hepatitis B as a routine part of a newborn's hospital care, just like checking the baby's hearing.

### **How could my baby come in contact with the hepatitis B virus?**

In many cases, the hepatitis B virus passes from mother to baby during birth when the mother does not know she is infected. In other cases, the virus is spread to the baby during close contact with an infected family member, care-giver, or friend. Most people who are infected with hepatitis B do not feel sick and have no idea they carry this virus. They are surprised when they are told they are infected. Many people have no idea how they became infected with the virus in the first place. To protect your baby from infection with the hepatitis B virus, make sure your baby receives the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine before leaving the hospital.

### **Won't my baby just recover from hepatitis B?**

Babies are not able to fight off hepatitis B as well as adults. About 9 out of 10 babies who get infected in the first year of life will stay infected for life.

### **How many doses of hepatitis B vaccine will my baby receive?**

The basic series is 3 or 4 doses. The first dose should be given in the hospital within 24 hours of birth, the second dose 1–2 months later, and the third dose at age 6 months or later. Because healthcare providers may choose to use a combination vaccine during well baby check-ups, some infants will receive 4 doses of hepatitis B vaccine. Either alternative is considered routine and acceptable.

### **How effective is hepatitis B vaccine?**

Very effective. More than 95% of infants, children, and adolescents develop immunity to the hepatitis B virus after 3 doses of properly spaced vaccine.

### **Is hepatitis B vaccine safe?**

Yes. Hepatitis B vaccine has been shown to be very safe when given to people of all ages. More than one billion hepatitis B shots have been given worldwide. In the United States, more than 120 million people, including infants, children, and adults have received hepatitis B vaccine. The most common side effects from hepatitis B vaccine are soreness at the injection site or slight fever. Serious side effects are rare.

Some parents worry that their baby's immune system is immature and cannot handle vaccination at such a young age. Actually, as soon as they are born, babies start effectively dealing with trillions of bacteria and viruses. The challenge to their immune systems from vaccines is tiny compared to the everyday challenges from living!

### **Why does my baby need so many vaccinations?**

It's true that little babies get lots of shots, which can cause temporary discomfort. The good news is that more vaccines mean more protection from serious diseases than in the past. Like hepatitis B, many of these diseases such as rotavirus, whooping cough, and meningitis can result in severe illness, hospitalization, and even death.

Make sure your baby gets all his or her vaccines at the recommended ages. It's the safest and surest way to protect children from deadly infectious diseases. Your baby is counting on you!