

Hepatitis B – Newborn

What is Hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver that is caused by a virus.
- The Hepatitis B virus can affect people in different ways. Most people who are infected with Hepatitis B do not get sick and have no symptoms. Some people get a mild illness; others can become very sick.
- Most people who get Hepatitis B recover completely. However, after the infection is finished some people are not able to rid their body of the virus. They continue to carry the virus in their body fluids for their entire life and may infect others. People who are “carriers” may develop liver problems later in life.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread from contact with the body fluids of an infected person. The virus is easy to catch. Even a tiny amount of the virus can infect a person.

Hepatitis B can be spread:

- From a woman to her baby, during pregnancy or birth
- From needles used for tattoos, body piercing, acupuncture or drugs
- By having unprotected sex with an infected partner (having many sex partners increases the risk of contact with Hepatitis B)
- From sharing toothbrushes, dental floss, razors, nail files or other items which could have tiny amounts of infected blood on them

How could my baby get Hepatitis B?

- From mom to baby during pregnancy
- From mom to baby during birth
- From exposure to the body fluids of a person with Hepatitis B

The virus does not get into breastmilk, so you will not pass the virus to your baby by breastfeeding.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B in babies?

- Most babies who have Hepatitis B do not have symptoms at birth. They don't usually get sick right away. It may take years before symptoms appear.
- Babies who are not treated will have this infection for life and might be able to infect others.

Can my baby be protected from Hepatitis B?

Yes, the babies of women with Hepatitis B can be treated soon after birth to prevent them from getting Hepatitis B.

A blood test can show if you have Hepatitis B. It is best if this blood test is done early in pregnancy, but it can also be done during labour. If the test shows that you have Hepatitis B or there is a chance that you were exposed to the Hepatitis B virus, your baby can be treated.

The treatment is 2 injections (needles) given within 12 hours of birth:

- The first dose of Hepatitis B vaccine
- One dose of Hepatitis B Immune Globulin (HBIG)

Your baby will need another dose of the Hepatitis B vaccine at 1 month and at 6 months of age. Your baby must have all doses to be fully protected from Hepatitis B infection.

If you have questions about Hepatitis B or how to treat your baby, please talk with:

- your doctor, midwife or health care provider
- your baby's doctor or health care provider

More information about Hepatitis B is available from the Public Health Agency of Canada at: www.publichealth.gc.ca