

# Hepatitis B Vaccine

## Addressing Common Questions about Hepatitis B Vaccination for Adults

### What disease does this vaccine protect against?

Hepatitis B vaccine can protect against hepatitis B virus, and the serious consequences of hepatitis B infection, including liver cancer, liver damage, and liver failure.

### How common is this disease?

In the United States, an estimated 800,000 to 1.4 million persons have chronic (long-term) hepatitis B virus infection. In 2011, there were an estimated 18,000 new hepatitis B virus infections in the United States. Many people don't know they are infected or may not have symptoms and therefore never seek medical treatment.

### How is this disease spread?

Hepatitis B virus is easily spread through contact with the blood or other body fluids of an infected person. People can also be infected from contact with an object contaminated with hepatitis B virus. The virus can live at least 7 days outside of the body. People who are chronically infected can spread hepatitis B virus to others.

### Who is at risk for this disease?

Although anyone can get hepatitis B infection, some adults are at greater risk. Adults are at increased risk of becoming infected with hepatitis B if they are:

- Sex partners of people infected with hepatitis B
- Sexually active persons with more than one sex partner
- Men who have sex with men
- Injection drug users
- Living with persons with chronic hepatitis B infection
- Healthcare and public safety workers at risk for occupational exposure to blood or blood-contaminated body fluids
- Hemodialysis patients
- Residents and staff of facilities for developmentally disabled persons
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis B is common

### What could happen if I get this disease?

Hepatitis B can cause acute (short-term) illness that can lead to loss of appetite, tiredness, pain in muscles, joints, and stomach, jaundice, diarrhea, and vomiting.

- Some people, mostly infants and young children, go on to develop chronic hepatitis B infection once they are infected.
- While most of the people infected do not have symptoms, the infection is still very serious, and can lead to liver damage (cirrhosis), liver cancer, and even death.

For more information on this and other vaccines for adults, visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults).

**DON'T WAIT.  
VACCINATE!**



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### Who should get this vaccine?

#### When and how often is this vaccine needed?

All unvaccinated adults at risk for hepatitis B infection should be vaccinated.

This includes:

- People with chronic liver or kidney disease and kidney dialysis patients
- People with diabetes under age 60 (Talk with your doctor if you are over 60 years old)
- People with HIV infection
- People with jobs that expose them to human blood or other body fluids
- Household contacts and sex partners of people infected with hepatitis B
- Residents and staff in institutions for the developmentally disabled
- People who travel to countries where hepatitis B is common
- Men who have sex with men
- People who inject street drugs
- People with more than one sex partner

Anyone else who wants to be protected from hepatitis B infection may also get the vaccine.

Adults getting hepatitis B vaccine typically get 3 doses — with the second dose given 4 weeks after the first and the third dose 5 months after the second. It is important to get all doses for best protection against hepatitis B infection.

### Who should not get this vaccine?

People who have had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis B vaccine OR those with a life-threatening allergy to yeast, or to any other component of the vaccine, should not get hepatitis B vaccine.

### How well does the vaccine work?

The rate of new hepatitis B infections has declined by approximately 82% since 1991 when vaccination against the disease began. The amount of protection you receive from hepatitis B vaccine depends on your age and health condition, but adults are expected to maintain long-term, possibly lifelong, immunity after vaccination with three doses. Getting vaccinated gives you the best protection possible against the disease.

### How safe is this vaccine?

Hepatitis B vaccine is very safe. It went through years of testing before being licensed by the FDA in 1991 and continues to be monitored for safety by the FDA and CDC. More than 100 million people in the United States have been vaccinated with hepatitis B vaccine.

#### Is it safe to get if I have certain health conditions or am taking prescription meds?

Unless you have had an allergic reaction in the past to this vaccine or have allergies to certain components of the vaccine, it is safe to get. It is safe for people taking prescription medications to get vaccines.

### What are the potential side effects of this vaccine?

In some cases, hepatitis B vaccine causes mild reactions that last up to a few days, such as soreness where the shot was given and fever. Severe problems are extremely rare. Severe allergic reactions are believed to occur about once in 1.1 million doses.

### Where can I get the vaccine?

Hepatitis B vaccine may be available at private doctor offices, public and travel health clinics, pharmacies, or other community locations (such as schools/universities). Check with your doctor or pharmacist or use the [Adult Vaccine Finder \(vaccine.healthmap.org\)](http://vaccine.healthmap.org) to help find places that provide hepatitis B vaccine near you.

### How much do the vaccine cost?

Most private health insurance covers recommended adult vaccines, including hepatitis B vaccine. Check with your insurance provider for details on whether there is any cost to you and for a list of in-network vaccine providers.

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## What You Need to Know

Many Vaccine Information Statements are available in Spanish and other languages. See [www.immunize.org/vis](http://www.immunize.org/vis)

Hojas de información sobre vacunas están disponibles en español y en muchos otros idiomas. Visite [www.immunize.org/vis](http://www.immunize.org/vis)

### 1 Why get vaccinated?

Hepatitis B is a serious disease that affects the liver. It is caused by the hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B can cause mild illness lasting a few weeks, or it can lead to a serious, lifelong illness.

Hepatitis B virus infection can be either acute or chronic.

**Acute hepatitis B virus infection** is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the hepatitis B virus. This can lead to:

- fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, and/or vomiting
- jaundice (yellow skin or eyes, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements)
- pain in muscles, joints, and stomach

**Chronic hepatitis B virus infection** is a long-term illness that occurs when the hepatitis B virus remains in a person's body. Most people who go on to develop chronic hepatitis B do not have symptoms, but it is still very serious and can lead to:

- liver damage (cirrhosis)
- liver cancer
- death

Chronically-infected people can spread hepatitis B virus to others, even if they do not feel or look sick themselves. Up to 1.4 million people in the United States may have chronic hepatitis B infection. About 90% of infants who get hepatitis B become chronically infected and about 1 out of 4 of them dies.

Hepatitis B is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluid infected with the Hepatitis B virus enters the body of a person who is not infected. People can become infected with the virus through:

- Birth (a baby whose mother is infected can be infected at or after birth)
- Sharing items such as razors or toothbrushes with an infected person
- Contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person
- Sex with an infected partner
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- Exposure to blood from needlesticks or other sharp instruments

Each year about 2,000 people in the United States die from hepatitis B-related liver disease.

**Hepatitis B vaccine** can prevent hepatitis B and its consequences, including liver cancer and cirrhosis.

### 2 Hepatitis B vaccine

Hepatitis B vaccine is made from parts of the hepatitis B virus. It cannot cause hepatitis B infection. The vaccine is usually given as 2, 3, or 4 shots over 1 to 6 months.

**Infants** should get their first dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth and will usually complete the series at 6 months of age.

All **children and adolescents** younger than 19 years of age who have not yet gotten the vaccine should also be vaccinated.

Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for unvaccinated **adults** who are at risk for hepatitis B virus infection, including:

- People whose sex partners have hepatitis B
- Sexually active persons who are not in a long-term monogamous relationship
- Persons seeking evaluation or treatment for a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sexual contact with other men
- People who share needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- People who have household contact with someone infected with the hepatitis B virus
- Health care and public safety workers at risk for exposure to blood or body fluids
- Residents and staff of facilities for developmentally disabled persons
- Persons in correctional facilities
- Victims of sexual assault or abuse
- Travelers to regions with increased rates of hepatitis B
- People with chronic liver disease, kidney disease, HIV infection, or diabetes
- Anyone who wants to be protected from hepatitis B

There are no known risks to getting hepatitis B vaccine at the same time as other vaccines.



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**3****Some people should not get this vaccine**

Tell the person who is giving the vaccine:

- **If the person getting the vaccine has any severe, life-threatening allergies.**  
If you ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of hepatitis B vaccine, or have a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine, you may be advised not to get vaccinated. Ask your health care provider if you want information about vaccine components.
- **If the person getting the vaccine is not feeling well.**  
If you have a mild illness, such as a cold, you can probably get the vaccine today. If you are moderately or severely ill, you should probably wait until you recover. Your doctor can advise you.

**4****Risks of a vaccine reaction**

With any medicine, including vaccines, there is a chance of side effects. These are usually mild and go away on their own, but serious reactions are also possible.

Most people who get hepatitis B vaccine do not have any problems with it.

**Minor problems** following hepatitis B vaccine include:

- soreness where the shot was given
- temperature of 99.9°F or higher

If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and last 1 or 2 days.

Your doctor can tell you more about these reactions.

**Other problems that could happen after this vaccine:**

- People sometimes faint after a medical procedure, including vaccination. Sitting or lying down for about 15 minutes can help prevent fainting and injuries caused by a fall. Tell your provider if you feel dizzy, or have vision changes or ringing in the ears.
- Some people get shoulder pain that can be more severe and longer-lasting than the more routine soreness that can follow injections. This happens very rarely.
- Any medication can cause a severe allergic reaction. Such reactions from a vaccine are very rare, estimated at about 1 in a million doses, and would happen within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

As with any medicine, there is a very remote chance of a vaccine causing a serious injury or death.

The safety of vaccines is always being monitored. For more information, visit: [www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/)

**5****What if there is a serious problem?**

**What should I look for?**

- Look for anything that concerns you, such as signs of a severe allergic reaction, very high fever, or unusual behavior.

Signs of a **severe allergic reaction** can include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, and weakness. These would start a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

**What should I do?**

- If you think it is a **severe allergic reaction** or other emergency that can't wait, call 9-1-1 or get to the nearest hospital. Otherwise, call your clinic.

Afterward, the reaction should be reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Your doctor should file this report, or you can do it yourself through the VAERS web site at [www.vaers.hhs.gov](http://www.vaers.hhs.gov), or by calling 1-800-822-7967.

*VAERS does not give medical advice.*

**6****The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program**

The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) is a federal program that was created to compensate people who may have been injured by certain vaccines.

Persons who believe they may have been injured by a vaccine can learn about the program and about filing a claim by calling 1-800-338-2382 or visiting the VICP website at [www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation](http://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation). There is a time limit to file a claim for compensation.

**7****How can I learn more?**

- Ask your healthcare provider. He or she can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - Call 1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO) or
  - Visit CDC's website at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

Vaccine Information Statement  
**Hepatitis B Vaccine**



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