



Side effects are usually mild

The hepatitis B vaccine is well tolerated, even in newborn babies. Side effects are usually mild and may include localized pain and low-grade fever. Serious reactions such as severe allergic reactions are extremely rare.

Protection is long lasting

Babies who complete the series of hepatitis B vaccinations will be fully immunized against Hepatitis B and do not require booster doses.

What if my baby is born prematurely?

Premature babies are more prone to infections, so it is important that they are protected against Hepatitis B.

However, their immune system may not respond as well to the vaccine. If your baby is born before 32 weeks or weighs less than 2 kilograms, they will need an extra dose of the vaccine at 12 months of age.

Who can I talk to about vaccinating my baby?

Your best source of information is your doctor, midwife, or community/ child health nurse. Advice from well-meaning family and friends may not be factually correct.

Will I need to consent for the Hepatitis B Vaccine?

The birth hospital will seek your consent and record the vaccination in your Personal Health Record. A letter certifying your infant's vaccination will also be given to you before your hospital discharge.

Contact your health care provider at:



**SIR LESTER BIRD
MEDICAL CENTRE**
Formerly Mount St. John's
Medical Centre
Michael's Mount
(268) 484 2700



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH,
WELLNESS AND THE
ENVIRONMENT**
Lower High Street
St. John's, Antigua
(268) 462 5522



HEPATITIS B VACCINATION FOR THE NEWBORN

An updated National
Immunization
Program Schedule

*Facts for expecting parents
and parents of newborns*

The best way to protect against Hepatitis B is with the Hepatitis B vaccine.



What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious contagious viral infection which causes inflammation of the liver. Once infected a person can develop either acute (short-term) or chronic (life-long) infection and over time, the infection can cause serious health problems and even liver cancer.

Babies infected with this virus have either no symptoms or very mild symptoms. Up to 90 percent of babies infected with hepatitis B will go on to become carriers of the virus.

How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B virus spreads through blood or other body fluids such as vaginal secretions, breast milk, semen and saliva that can contain small amounts of blood from an infected person. People can spread the virus even when they have few or no symptoms.

Babies and children can get hepatitis B in the following ways:

- at birth from their infected mother
- being bitten by an infected person
- by touching open cuts or sores of an infected person
- through sharing toothbrushes or other personal items used by an infected person (virus can live on objects for 7 days or more)
- from food that was chewed (for a baby) by an infected person

Hepatitis B is preventable



Immunization with the hepatitis B vaccine is highly effective and generally provides long-lasting protection.

The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for all infants according to the National Immunization Program Schedule. The schedule has been updated to include the dose at birth.

When is the vaccine given?

To ensure your baby has the best protection against hepatitis B your child should be immunized:

- **at birth (within 24 hours)**
- **at 2 months, at 4 months and at 6 months** (as routinely done with other childhood immunizations)

Your baby can receive their first dose up to seven days after birth. If your baby doesn't receive a birth dose by the seventh day, then the first dose of the vaccine can be given at 2 months of age.

If a mother is a hepatitis B carrier, your baby should also be given immunoglobulin, preferably within 12 hours of birth. Immunoglobulin provides immediate protection while your baby develops immunity from the vaccine given at the same time.

Why is the birth dose so important?



- Mothers with hepatitis B can infect their baby at birth through contact with blood, or soon after birth through breastfeeding
- It is possible that another person in your home or family is a carrier of hepatitis B. Many carriers are not aware that they have the virus
- The risk of becoming a carrier is highest in the very young because infants have few or no symptoms and infection is not obvious
- The birth dose will provide some protection against the virus if your baby is late with their 2-month vaccinations

The hepatitis B vaccine is safe

The benefits of vaccinating your baby against hepatitis B far outweigh the risk of side effects.

The hepatitis B vaccine does not contain preservatives (such as thiomersal) or antibiotics. It is not a live vaccine. It is produced in yeast cells and is free from animal and human blood products. The vaccine won't interfere with breastfeeding.