

# Adult Immunizations: Hepatitis B

Every year, thousands of adults suffer from severe illnesses, and many may even die, from diseases that can be prevented.

Hepatitis B is a liver disease that, over time, can cause many health problems; some mild, some very serious.

The good news is that Hepatitis B can be prevented, the best way is to get vaccinated.

Hepatitis B is a virus that can be spread from an infected person to a non-infected person through bodily fluids, like blood and semen. It can live on objects for up to 7 days.

When this virus enters your body, it attacks your liver.

Under attack, your liver stops doing many of the important jobs it needs to do to keep your body healthy, including cleaning your blood and fighting infections.

Over time, the Hepatitis B virus causes liver inflammation, scarring of your liver, liver cancer, and liver failure. Any damage to your liver can cause serious health problems and may lead to death.

The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is to get vaccinated.

Your body reacts to the vaccine by making antibodies which fight against the virus to protect you.

After getting a vaccine, when your body comes in contact with those germs again, it already has the ability to fight them and can prevent the infection.

Most people are vaccinated for Hepatitis B as children. If you have not been vaccinated, talk to your healthcare provider about getting vaccinated today.

Everyone is at some risk for Hepatitis B if you are not vaccinated. But some people are at greater risk. If you have multiple sexual partners, are a man who has sex with other men, have regular contact with a person who has Hepatitis B, inject drugs or share needles, have diabetes, work in an area where you are exposed to blood talk to your healthcare provider to make sure you are protected from Hepatitis B.

If you have ever had a severe reaction to a vaccine, tell your healthcare provider before getting this vaccine.

If you are allergic to the ingredients in this vaccine, you should not get it.

Most vaccines are given by injection.

Depending on the Hepatitis B vaccine you receive you will either be given 2 or 3 injections over 4 to 6 month period.

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Talk to your healthcare provider about which Hepatitis B vaccine is right for you.

If you aren't feeling well when one of your injections is scheduled, talk to your healthcare provider. He may recommend you wait until you feel better to get the vaccine.

You may be told to wait about a month after each injection to donate blood because the donor screening test may show Hepatitis B in your bloodstream. This is the vaccine and not actually the infection but you may not be able to donate blood at that time.

If you have a weakened immune system or are a hemodialysis patient, your healthcare provider may recommend you get a booster of this vaccine. And you may receive a different dosage of the vaccine.

The Hepatitis B vaccine is safe. But as with any medication, there is a small risk of side effects.

The most common side effect is a reaction at the injection site. Look for redness, swelling and soreness at the site. These should go away after a few days.

Less common side effects may include fever.

If you have a severe allergic reaction like trouble breathing, hives, swelling of your face or throat or if you have chest pain, fast heartbeat, dizziness or feel like you are going to pass out call 911 and get help immediately.

This is not the complete list of side effects. Make sure you discuss all possible side effects with your healthcare provider.

You can begin your Hepatitis B vaccine schedule at your next healthcare appointment. Or you can get it at your local pharmacy or community health clinic.

It's a good idea to keep a list of all vaccines you get so you don't double-up in the future. Ask your healthcare provider for a print-out of your records or keep a log yourself.

Your records should include the date, type of vaccine dose and where you got it. Let a family member know where you keep this list in case of emergency.

Hepatitis B can cause serious, sometimes life-threatening health problems. But it can be prevented. If you have not been vaccinated before, talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about getting started. It is the best way to prevent infection and stay healthy.