



HEPATITIS B

Information for pregnant women

During pregnancy there are a range of tests that will be offered to you. One of the tests is a blood test to detect the hepatitis B virus. This test tells us which babies will need early protection from hepatitis B.

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that affects the liver. When people have this illness they may be jaundiced (yellowing of the skin and eyes), suffer tiredness, loss of appetite, vomiting, stomach upsets and pain, and generally feel unwell.

The virus is passed on through close contact with blood or other body fluids, or through sex without a condom. Although the infection clears in most people, some of those infected continue to carry the virus in their blood (hepatitis B carriers) and can pass it on to others.

When a person has been infected with, and carries the hepatitis B virus for longer than six months – this is called chronic hepatitis B. The longer the person carries this virus the more likely they are to have long-term health problems. People with chronic hepatitis B infection may benefit from treatment with antiviral drugs and need follow-up blood tests. In the future they may develop liver disease, eg, liver failure and liver cancer. Ask your doctor for more information.

Partners and children of a person who carries the hepatitis B virus can be tested and offered hepatitis B immunisation, if they have not already been immunised.

National Immunisation Schedule

To protect your baby from hepatitis B and other diseases your baby needs to have at:

	Hep B	HBIG	DTaP-IPV-Hep B/Hib	PCV7	Hib	MMR	DTaP-IPV	dTap	HPV
Birth*	•	•							
6 weeks			•	•					
3 months			•	•					
5 months			•	•					
15 months				•	•	•			
4 years						•	•		
11 years								•	
12 years (girls only)									•

Hep B – hepatitis B; HBIG – hepatitis B immunoglobulin; D – diphtheria; T – Tetanus; aP – acellular Pertussis; IPV – inactivated Polio vaccine; Hib – *Haemophilus influenzae* type b; PCV7 – Pneumococcal; MMR – Measles-Mumps-Rubella; d – adult dose diphtheria; ap – adult dose acellular pertussis; HPV – human papillomavirus.

* Hep B and HBIG are given at birth to babies of hepatitis B positive mothers.

Protecting your baby from Hepatitis B with immunisation

If your blood test is positive for hepatitis B, this indicates that the virus is carried in your blood and the infection can be passed onto your baby during labour or delivery.

Your baby can be protected from the virus by giving the hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immunoglobulin (special antibodies) directly after birth. These injections will give your baby initial protection from the disease. Both the vaccine and immunoglobulin are safe and effective products.

Your baby will also need the usual hepatitis vaccine in the combined vaccine on the National Immunisation Schedule at 6 weeks, 3 months and 5 months of age. This schedule protects almost all children (92-97 percent) from hepatitis B infection. For more information on the National Immunisation Schedule ask your doctor or nurse. All childhood immunisations are free in New Zealand. See the National Immunisation Schedule below.

At five months of age your baby will be given a blood test to check if your baby is protected against hepatitis B or has been infected with the virus. If your baby is not protected a further two doses of the hepatitis B vaccine may be required.

Hepatitis B vaccine

The hepatitis B vaccine is synthetically produced and does not contain blood products. The vaccine is one of the vaccines on the National Immunisation Schedule.

Hepatitis B immunoglobulin

Hepatitis B immunoglobulin is a purified blood product and contains high levels of the hepatitis B antibody. It is best given within the first 12 hours after birth and it stays in the body for a few weeks. This protects your baby until the vaccine has time to work.

How does hepatitis B vaccine and immunoglobulin protect?

The body's immune system fights illness and infections. If an infection enters your body the immune system makes antibodies from your blood cells to fight the infection. The antibodies "remember the infection" and protect you from illness in the future.

The antibodies in the hepatitis B immunoglobulin product protect your baby immediately against hepatitis B. The vaccine stimulates the body to make antibodies but this takes time, and will provide long-term protection.

How are immunoglobulins made?

This blood product is made from blood collected from healthy volunteer New Zealand donors or North American donors. No-one can be a blood donor if they have health problems, a family history of particular conditions, a serious infection, or have taken part in certain activities. All blood donations are screened for hepatitis B, HIV, hepatitis C, and syphilis. There have been no cases of these diseases in New Zealand as a result of a person having had hepatitis B immunoglobulin. The manufacturing process for hepatitis B immunoglobulin minimises the chance of transmitting infection.

What are the risks when you are given a blood product, eg, hepatitis B immunoglobulin?

As with any medical procedure, blood products such as hepatitis B immunoglobulin carry some risks. Some of the risks are:

- severe inflammatory reactions: these are very rare and can be treated
- mild inflammatory reactions: any vaccine/injection may cause a rash or rise in temperature
- the injection may cause an infection. However, serious infections from blood products are extremely rare because of the careful selection and testing of donors.

For more information about immunisation check the following websites:

- www.moh.govt.nz/immunisation.html
- www.healthed.govt.nz
- www.immune.org.nz

The chance of serious problems is low. Although there have been rare reports of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) being spread by blood, any person with a known risk of contracting vCJD is excluded from donating blood.

Is there an alternative treatment to the hepatitis B immunoglobulin?

There is currently no alternative treatment available to minimise the risk of your baby catching hepatitis B at birth. The hepatitis B vaccine alone is not as effective as giving both the hepatitis B vaccine and immunoglobulin.

Consent for treatment for your baby

As with any treatment, you have the right to decide whether you want your baby to have these treatments. This leaflet provides information on hepatitis B, and the benefits and risks of these injections. Your lead maternity carer, doctor or nurse will discuss this treatment with you and answer any concerns or questions you may have.

If you agree to your baby receiving the hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immunoglobulin shortly after birth, your lead maternity carer will ask you to sign a consent form to show that you understand and consent to this treatment.

The information you give us about you and your child will be kept by your doctor, local Medical Officer of Health, in your maternity records and on the National Immunisation Register. Your local Medical Officer of Health will ensure that your child receives follow-up care and the full course of hepatitis B vaccine in the first year of life.

Your lead maternity carer will also discuss with you the other vaccines on the National Immunisation Schedule and can provide you with more information on immunisation. You will be asked to consent to your baby having the other vaccines prior to the six weeks of age immunisation.

Immunisation records

Your doctor or nurse keeps a record of all the immunisations given to your baby and they also write them in the back of your child's *Well Child Tamariki Ora* health book. Remember to take this book each time your baby is immunised.

Information will be recorded at the National Immunisation Register (NIR). Please ask your doctor or nurse for more information on the NIR. It is possible to opt-off the NIR, however it is important that your baby is followed up. The NIR will assist.

New Zealand Government



This resource is available from www.healthed.govt.nz or the Authorised Provider at your local DHB.
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