



Hepatitis B Vaccination in Newborns and Infants

▢ What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver. Chronic infection over the course of a lifetime can lead to liver damage, liver failure, liver cancer, or even death.

▢ How do newborns get Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is transmitted through blood or body fluids. Exposure to newborns usually occurs during labor and delivery.

▢ If the baby's mother does not test positive for Hepatitis B, why does the baby need to be vaccinated?

Adults with an infection may not know they carry the virus. Hepatitis B is highly contagious, and caregivers or household contacts can transmit the virus through blood, saliva, or body fluids. The birth dose helps protect infants and prevents infection when a mother's results are unknown, falsely negative, or not yet available.

▢ When did babies first start to get the Hepatitis B vaccine in the United States?

Universal vaccination of newborns in the U.S. began in 1991, and the rate of childhood infections has decreased dramatically since then.

▢ Why is it important for a child under the age of 10 years to be vaccinated against Hepatitis B?

Children infected between one and five years of age have a 25–50% chance of becoming infected for life (chronic Hepatitis B). About 25% of these children may die from the disease.

▢ Is the Hepatitis B vaccine safe for my baby?

Yes. The Hepatitis B vaccine has been carefully studied in infants and children. Like other vaccines, some babies may have mild soreness or fussiness after the shot, but serious allergic reactions are extremely rare — about 1 in every 600,000 doses or fewer.

References:

- American Academy of Pediatrics (2017). Pediatrics, 140(3), e20171870.
- Red Book (33rd Edition, 2024). American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: Vaccine Education Center — <https://www.chop.edu/centers-programs/vaccine-education-center>