



# Hepatitis B Vaccine

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Vaccines are one of the best advancements in public health, and a great way to protect yourself and your family against serious infections. Hepatitis B can be prevented with a Hepatitis B vaccination series.

## **What is Hepatitis B?**

The Hepatitis B virus can permanently damage your liver. It's the most common cause of liver cancer worldwide. You need your liver to digest food and remove waste from your body.

People with the disease often become tired, feverish, lose their appetite, and sometimes get yellow skin and eyes (called jaundice). You can be infected with Hepatitis B and not even know it. This means you can infect someone else without knowing.

Hepatitis B is spread through blood and body fluids from an infected person. It's primarily a sexually transmitted infection, but you can also pick it up through used needles, and body/ear piercing or tattooing with dirty equipment. An infected mother can pass it to her child at birth. You can't get Hepatitis B from someone coughing, hugging or using the same dishes.

There is no cure for Hepatitis B. Most people get well, but about 10 per cent will carry the virus for life and keep infecting other people. Some people will continue to have liver problems for the rest of their lives.

## **When Should the Hepatitis B Vaccine be Given?**

Hepatitis B can be given from birth and onward. In Ontario it is routinely given to grade 7 students. Individuals with certain conditions are also eligible to receive Hepatitis B vaccine. Speak with your healthcare provider to see if you may receive this vaccine at no cost.

For those aged 11 to 15 years, a two dose schedule is followed (an initial dose followed by the second dose 4-6 months later). For everyone else, a three dose schedule is most often used (an initial dose, with a second dose one month later, and a third dose five months after the second dose). Some people require an alternate dosing schedule or extra doses. Your healthcare provider will let you know if you need this.

## **What are the Possible Side Effects?**

You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your doctor or health care professional. The Hepatitis B vaccine is well tolerated. Reactions are generally mild and may include: irritability, headache, fatigue, pain and redness at the injection site.

Severe allergic reactions such as hives, wheezing, trouble breathing, or swelling of the face and mouth are very rare. Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room if you experience any of those side effects, and report them to your doctor or local public health unit.

### **How Effective is This Vaccine?**

When provided according to the recommended schedule, the hepatitis B vaccine is 95-100% effective in preventing chronic infection. Once all doses are received, booster doses are generally not required, but may be needed in some cases.

### **Who Should Not Get This Vaccine?**

You may not be able to receive the vaccine if you:

- have a moderate or severe acute illness
- have a hypersensitivity to yeast
- have had a past severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to this vaccine, or any component of it

### **Who Should I Talk to if I Have Any Questions?**

Contact your healthcare provider. You can also visit [www.algomapublichealth.com](http://www.algomapublichealth.com), or phone the Algoma Public Health Immunization Program at (705) 759-5409, or your local public health office.

### **Your Vaccine Record**

Your personal vaccine record should be updated after each immunization you receive. It is the duty of parents/guardians to provide immunization records for their school age children to their local public health unit. Immunization Connect Ontario (ICON) is a secure system to view and report immunization information to Algoma Public Health. Visit [www.algomapublichealth.com/icon](http://www.algomapublichealth.com/icon) for details.