

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why should all pregnant women be tested for hepatitis B?

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Practice recommend that all pregnant women should be routinely tested for Hepatitis B Surface Antigen (HBsAg) during an early prenatal visit, in each pregnancy.

2. Why do I need to be tested for hepatitis B with this pregnancy if I was negative for hepatitis B with my last baby?

The above organizations recommend that women be tested with *each* pregnancy to assure the woman has not been infected since the previous testing.

3. Is hepatitis B a problem for babies born in Ohio?

Yes! In 2001 354 new infant exposures were found by the Perinatal Hepatitis B Prevention Program (PHBPP).

4. How do you get hepatitis B?

Anyone can get hepatitis B. It is spread from an infected person during birth from mother or child, by unprotected sex, by contact with blood, sharing personal items such as razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers that may have blood or other body fluids on them, sharing needles in body piercing, tattooing, injecting drugs or acupuncture. It is not spread by sneezing, coughing, sharing dishes, holding hands, hugging or kissing on the lips.

5. What are the symptoms for hepatitis B?

Some people who become infected might have loss of appetite, yellow skin and eyes, nausea, vomiting, fever, weakness, tiredness, abdominal pain, joint pain and dark urine. Most people who get hepatitis B don't look or feel sick when they first get the disease.

6. I have chronic hepatitis B but my doctor said I am OK. Is this a problem for my baby?

Yes! When you are chronic you can still infect others, in other words, you are a "carrier." Your baby comes in contact with your blood during delivery putting the baby at high-risk for getting the virus from you.

7. What makes a baby "high-risk" for hepatitis B?

There are two reasons a baby is considered high-risk: 1) Being born to a mother known to have hepatitis B; 2) The mother's hepatitis B status is unknown at delivery.

8. I've had the vaccines for hepatitis B. I'm pregnant and my test came back positive for hepatitis B. How can this be?

If you had chronic hepatitis B before receiving the vaccines, they will not change that you have hepatitis B.

9. I'm chronic for hepatitis B. Should I get the vaccine?

See the answer for question No. 8.

10. Is it safe to breast feed my baby if I have hepatitis B?

Yes! It is safe even immediately after delivery. However, the baby should get Hepatitis B Immune Globulin (HBIG) and hepatitis B vaccine within 12 hours of birth.

11. Why is it so important for my baby to get the hepatitis B immunizations on time?

It is important to get all three doses on time as the younger a person is the more likely it is that they will become infected. The best protection comes from getting all three vaccines on time. The schedule for the high-risk baby is slightly different, with the first vaccine being given within 12 hours of birth, then another at 1 and 6 months of age.

12. I'm pregnant and just found out I have hepatitis B. Is this a problem for my other children?

You should make sure your other children have had all three immunizations for hepatitis B. If not, they need to finish the series. Unless you know for sure you did not have Hepatitis B when your other children were born they should have blood drawn to make sure they do not have the virus, and that they have the protection they need. If they are not yet protected they can get more shots. To protect them, and others see the answer to question number 4.

13. I'm pregnant and just found out I have hepatitis B. Should I see a special doctor?

Yes. You should see a liver specialist (gastroenterologist or hepatologist) right away.

Let the doctor know you are pregnant. Your sex partner, children and other people living in your house should be tested for hepatitis B. If they do not have the virus they should get vaccinated. If they do have the virus they should also see a specialist.

14. I am adopting a baby from another country. Should the baby be tested for hepatitis B?

Yes, the baby should be tested as soon as possible. If the baby does not have the virus she/he should start the vaccine right away. If the baby does have the virus she/he should see a liver specialist right away.