

PROTECTION FROM HEPATITIS B

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a vaccine-preventable liver disease caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). It ranges in severity from a mild illness, lasting a few weeks (acute), to a serious long-term illness (chronic) that can lead to liver disease or liver cancer. Many people have no symptoms and will recover from the infection. Others may have acute illness with symptoms of tiredness, loss of appetite and yellowing of their skin and eyes (called jaundice). Some people may never recover and will become chronic carriers. Chronic carriers may feel well but are capable of transmitting the virus to others without knowing.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by direct contact with infectious blood and body fluids. Hepatitis B is most commonly spread by sexual contact and through sharing contaminated needles and equipment used for injecting drugs, tattooing or piercing. An infected mother may also pass the virus on to her baby during pregnancy and childbirth.

Why do we recommend vaccination for Hepatitis B?

Many new cases of Hepatitis B occur yearly in teenagers and young adults. Vaccinating school age children provides protection before a possible exposure to the virus. Community/public health nurses offer the Hepatitis B vaccine to all students in grade six as part of the provincially funded immunization program. Immunization consists of two doses of the vaccine, administered in the arm, given six months apart.

What are the vaccine's common side effects?

Common side effects may include soreness, swelling and /or redness at the injection site, slight fever, headache, tiredness or irritability. Serious side effects are rare and should be reported to the community/public health nurse.

Is the Hepatitis B vaccine safe?

All vaccines recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Provincial Department of Health and Community Services such as this one are safe and effective.

Who should NOT get the vaccine?

Anyone who has a severe allergic reaction to any contents of the vaccine or had a reaction to a previous dose of this vaccine should talk to their Health Care Provider for advice about future immunization with this vaccine.

Is this vaccine mandatory?

The vaccine is not mandatory but is highly recommended for protection against preventable disease. Informed written consent is required before administration of this vaccine.

If your child has already received a vaccine containing Hepatitis B (ex. *Twinrix* vaccine for travel) please provide a record to the community/public health nurse.

For additional information and services contact the Regional Health Authority in your community.