

Patient Information:

Hepatitis B

What Is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Several specific modes of transmission have been identified, including sexual contact; intravenous drug abuse; occupational exposures; household contact with a person who has an acute infection or with a chronic carrier; receipt of certain blood products; and hemodialysis. Over one-third of patients with acute hepatitis B do not have readily identifiable risk factors. The acute and chronic consequences of hepatitis B virus infection are major health problems in the United States. The reported incidence of acute hepatitis B increased by 37% from 1979 to 1989. In addition, chronic HBV carriers are much more likely to get cancer of the liver. Between 1 - 1.25 million U.S. residents are chronic carriers of the disease and are potentially infectious to others. Chronic infection often causes cirrhosis of the liver (liver destruction) and death due to liver failure with about 240,000 new HBV infections occur each year. About 4,000 people die each year of chronic liver disease caused by hepatitis B.

What is the Hepatitis B vaccine?

Immunization with hepatitis B vaccine is the most effective means of preventing HBV infection and its consequences. In the United States, most infections occur among young adults and adolescents. Recombinant yeast-derived vaccines are inactivated viral vaccines and do not contain human blood products. Two recombinant vaccines are currently licensed in the United States and are equally effective. The vaccine is given by injection on three separate dates. Usually, the first two doses are given 1 month apart, and the third dose, 5 months after the second. After three doses, the hepatitis B vaccine is 85% - 95% effective in preventing hepatitis B infection. Protection for normal, healthy adults and children given vaccine may last a lifetime. Booster doses of vaccine are not routinely recommended at the present time.

What are the contraindications to receiving the vaccine?

- ◆ Hypersensitivity to yeast, aluminum hydroxide, thimerosal or formaldehyde
- ◆ Acute febrile illness

- ◆ Severely compromised cardiopulmonary status

What are the possible side effects?

The most common side effect is soreness at the site of injection. Illnesses, such as neurologic reactions, have been reported after vaccine is given, but hepatitis B vaccine is not believed to be the cause of these illnesses. As with any drug or vaccine, there is a rare possibility that allergic or more serious reactions or even death could occur. No deaths, however, have been reported in persons who have received this vaccine. Giving hepatitis B vaccine to persons who are already immune or to carriers, although of no benefit, will not increase the risk of side effects.

How much does it cost?

Please see the "Charges: What isn't covered by the health fee" information sheet located at <http://www.healthcenter.vt.edu/pdf/MCInfoSheet-charges.pdf> or contact the Allergy and Immunization Clinic at 540/231-7621.

Student health prices are only available to Virginia Tech students and are subject to change.

TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE SHC IMMUNIZATION CLINIC, PLEASE CALL 231-7621. INFORMATION ABOUT HEPATITIS B AND HEPATITIS B VACCINE