

## How long does the protection last for my baby?

There is good evidence to show that babies who have been fully immunised against hepatitis B will have long-lasting protection.

## Are there any side effects to the vaccine?

The birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine is very well tolerated by newborn babies and does not interfere with breast feeding. Serious side effects are very rare.

If you are concerned talk to your midwife, doctor or immunisation provider.



## References:

Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, Canberra, 2022, [immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au](https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC) Hepatitis B Questions and Answers for the Public. [cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/bfaq.htm](https://cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/bfaq.htm)

Hepatitis Australia; [hepatitisaustralia.com/Pages/Category/hepatitis-b](https://hepatitisaustralia.com/Pages/Category/hepatitis-b)

# Hepatitis B vaccination at birth

## Why your baby needs it



For more information

SA Health  
PO Box 6 Rundle Mall  
Adelaide SA 5000  
[sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation](https://sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation)

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## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a very common liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus. It can be serious and may be a short-term infection or develop into a chronic (lifelong) infection.

Symptoms of hepatitis B include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, yellow skin and eyes, aching muscles and joints and arthritis.

Not all people who are infected develop symptoms. Young children, especially those less than one year of age, generally do not show symptoms of infection.

Some people can fight the infection and recover but others, especially babies and young children, may not clear the infection and may develop chronic hepatitis B which is lifelong.

The younger a person is when they become infected, the more likely they are to develop chronic hepatitis B.

Chronic hepatitis B can lead to liver cancer and liver failure later in life.

**9 out of 10 infants infected at less than one year of age will develop chronic hepatitis B infection and usually remain infectious for life.**

## How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is highly infectious and can easily spread through contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids.

Newborn babies most commonly get hepatitis B before or during birth from an infected mother.

Babies and children can also get hepatitis B:

- > through household or other close personal contact with an infected person
- > through skin or mucous membrane breaks or contact between open sores or wounds (eg child to child)
- > through sharing personal items used by an infected person (eg toothbrush)

People infected with hepatitis B can transmit the virus even if they do not develop any symptoms. This means that people with hepatitis B may not know they have the virus because they do not feel sick, but they can still spread the virus to others.

The hepatitis B virus can survive outside the body for up to seven days and can still cause infection during that time.

**Many people don't know they have the hepatitis B virus but can still spread it to others.**



## How can I protect my baby from hepatitis B?

You can protect your baby from birth with a very safe and widely used hepatitis B vaccine. It is very effective and provides long-term protection in most cases.

In addition, babies born to mothers with known hepatitis B infection will be offered an injection of hepatitis B immunoglobulin within the first 12 hours of birth to help prevent the spread of infection to the baby.

## Why do all newborns need the hepatitis B vaccine before they leave hospital?

Giving the hepatitis B vaccine, preferably within 24 hours of birth, provides the best protection for all babies, including those who may have contracted the virus from the mother during birth.

It also provides protection against the spread of infection to babies in the first months of life, from household or other close contacts infected with hepatitis B.

## What if my baby does not receive the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine?

If the vaccine is not given within 24 hours of birth, it can still be given up to 7 days of age.

If your baby did not have the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine in the first 7 days, they should commence their routine childhood immunisations at six weeks of age to provide protection as early as possible.

## How many doses of the hepatitis B vaccine does my baby need?

With your consent, your baby will receive a dose of hepatitis B vaccine, preferably within 24 hours of birth.

Following this birth dose, three more doses of hepatitis B vaccine are recommended at 6 weeks, 4 and 6 months of age to provide long-term protection.

Premature babies born at less than 32 weeks gestation or weighing less than 2000 grams at birth will need an extra dose at 12 months of age. Your doctor or nurse can advise you if this will be required for your baby.