

Can (and Should) My Baby Get a Hepatitis B Vaccine?



A guide to help you make informed choices about your child's vaccination schedule, in light of recent changes to federal policy and recommendations.

What is Hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B is a serious liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (hep B).
- Hep B is contagious and spreads through contact with bodily fluid.
- Adults are likely to make a full recovery from hep B. However, **infants and children** are more likely to develop a chronic, long-lasting hep B infection.
- **This chronic infection can cause life-threatening liver problems including liver cancer and liver failure.**

What has changed?

- Recently, federal guidance changed to recommend that the hep B vaccine not be given to newborns, but delayed two months. However, your baby **can still get the vaccine at birth.**
- The new policy focuses on **shared clinical-decision making.** This just means a discussion with a healthcare provider to help you decide if this vaccine is right for your child.
- **This policy change is not based on verified safety or effectiveness concerns.**

Why is the Hepatitis B vaccine so important for infants?

- Infants and children are much more likely than adults to contract a chronic hep B infection if they are unvaccinated. Early symptoms are often undetectable and go untreated.
- The most common way that infants contract hep B is during the birth process. This can happen because their mother is unaware she is infected, but also because hospital settings can be a hep B risk for undeveloped immune systems.
- **Giving all infants a dose of the hep B vaccine at birth has nearly eliminated hep B in infants.**

What are the impacts of delaying hep B vaccines?

- **Delaying vaccines means that more babies will be exposed to hep B while their immune systems are still weak.**
- Many babies who lack access to regular healthcare may not get vaccinated for hep B at all.

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Can my baby still get vaccinated at birth?

- **The short answer is YES.** This federal recommendation does not prohibit hep B vaccines from being given at birth.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics still **recommends vaccinating within 24 hours** of birth, with additional doses at 1-2 months and 6-18 months.
- But, depending on how different states, hospitals, and clinics rely on federal guidelines to make their own rules, some providers **may choose not to** automatically give hep B vaccines to newborns.
- Talk **with your doctor and your baby's pediatrician** to make the best choice for your family regarding hep B vaccination.

What if I don't have insurance?

- The birth dose of hep B vaccine is **still available** for uninsured patients through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program.
- Speak with your healthcare provider for more information.

Will my insurance cover the cost of hep B vaccination?

- **Most likely.** Most insurance companies have stated that they will continue to cover the hep B vaccine, including at birth.
- This is because giving the vaccine at birth is the safe and effective way to prevent infants and children from being infected with hep B during the birth process.
- **Contact your insurance company** for personalized information about your coverage.

➔ Bottom Line ←

- The hep B vaccine is **safe and effective** to prevent infection in newborns.
- The hep B vaccine is **still available** and covered by insurance at birth.
- **Your healthcare provider can help you** make the best decisions for you and your baby.