



Hepatitis B Vaccine

Information Sheet

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect against some very serious infections. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization strongly recommends routine immunizations. Annual new cases of hepatitis B in Ontario have been reduced by two-thirds since the Grade 7 immunization program started. To have your Grade 7 student protected against hepatitis B, read the following information and complete and sign the enclosed consent form. Have your child return the completed consent form to his or her teacher on the next school day.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B (hep B) is a virus that can permanently damage your liver. It's the biggest cause of liver cancer world-wide. You need your liver to digest food and remove waste from your body. People with the disease often become tired, feverish, lose their appetite, and sometimes get yellow skin and eyes (called jaundice). There may be many more people who have hep B. You can get it and not even know it. That means you can infect someone else without knowing.

How can you catch hep B?

You can get hep B through the blood and other body fluids from an infected person. It's primarily transmitted by intimate contact, but you can also get it from used needles, and through body/ear piercing or tattooing with dirty equipment. An infected mother can pass it to her child at birth. You can't get hep B from someone coughing, or from hugging or using the same dishes.

Is there a cure?

There is no cure for hep B. Most people get well, but about 10% will carry the virus for life and keep infecting other people. Some people will continue to have liver problems for the rest of their lives. Some will develop liver cancer and die. Hep B can be prevented by getting vaccinated.

Is the vaccine safe?

The vaccine is safe. It's been given to Grade 7 students in Ontario since 1994 in order to provide them with protection at an age before they might be exposed to the virus. A nurse gives the injection two times during the school year. The vaccine may cause minor side effects, maybe redness, warmth or slight swelling where the needle went in; maybe tiredness or slight fever

for a day or so. More serious reactions occurring within 15 days should be reported to your doctor or local Health Unit. These include breathing trouble, swelling of face or mouth, a fever of more than 39°C, hives or rashes. The risk from hep B disease is much greater than the risk from the vaccine; however, some people should not have this vaccine.

Who should not receive the vaccine?

- Persons who have had a past allergic reaction to the vaccine.
- Persons who have a known allergy to any component of the vaccine (thimerosal, aluminum, yeast, latex).
- Persons who have a fever or anything more serious than a minor cold should wait until feeling better to get the vaccine.
- Persons who are pregnant or breastfeeding, discuss with health care provider.

Record of protection

After your child receives both doses of hepatitis B vaccine, he/she will be given a vaccination record card and instructed to give it to his/her parent or guardian for safe-keeping with his/her other immunization records.

Any vaccine your child receives through the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit will automatically be updated on his/her immunization record at the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit. Please notify the health unit every time your child receives vaccine anywhere else (i.e. doctors' office or travel clinic) so that we can update his/her record. You can update your child's record on line at www.hnhu.org or by calling a member of the Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPD) Team at 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623.

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