

Preventing Transfer of Hepatitis B to your Baby

If you are pregnant and carrying the Hepatitis B virus, and to reduce the risk of passing the infection to your baby

Your baby's health care team has recommended the Hepatitis B vaccine and Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin "needle"

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a disease caused by a virus that infects the liver. In many cases the disease can be mild or brief. However, in some cases it can cause severe liver damage or failure, liver cancer or long-term, chronic illness. Many people may be carriers of the virus without having symptoms. The World Health Organization estimates that 350 million people worldwide are carriers of the virus, with or without disease.

The virus can be passed between people during sharing of body fluids, such as sexual intercourse, needles or razors. However, in most cases the virus is passed from mothers to babies during child birth. The younger a person is when infected with the virus, the greater the chance of having a long term illness.

What is the Hepatitis B vaccine?

The first injection of Hepatitis B vaccine is to lower the risk of Hepatitis B infection in your baby. The first vaccine injection should be given as soon as possible after birth, then a second one at 1 month, and a third at 6 months. Your regular Pediatrician or Family Physician will arrange for the second and third vaccine injections. Your baby will be tested afterwards to see if the vaccine injections were effective.

What is the Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin (HBIG)?

Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin (HBIG) is a collection of antibodies against Hepatitis B taken from other people's donated blood. Under certain circumstances the medical team may only give the vaccine without the immunoglobulin but most of the time both are needed.

What are the side effects of the Hepatitis B vaccine or HBIG?

Both of these injections are generally very well tolerated, with few if any side effects. Occasionally, there may be mild redness or swelling at the injection site, or a short, mild fever. Allergic reactions are possible but very rare in babies, and the medical team will watch closely for them.

In the case of Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin, since it is made from blood donor products, there is a very small risk of infection. The samples are tested for Hepatitis C and HIV, so these are very unlikely to be present in the injection. It is possible that an unknown virus may be present in the injection. However, the benefit of preventing the transfer of Hepatitis B to your baby outweighs the very low risks of the injections.

What if I have more questions?

Feel free to ask your health care team members if you have any further questions about Hepatitis B or the Hepatitis B vaccine.