



# Hepatitis B and your Baby

## What is Hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B (Hep B) is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause serious illness.
- Hep B can lead to scarring of the liver, liver cancer or even death.
- While most adults will recover completely from Hep B and can't catch the disease again, most babies who are infected with Hep B will become long term carriers.
- Carriers may have no symptoms and feel well, but they can infect others.

## How do you get Hepatitis B?

- Hep B is much easier to catch than HIV/AIDS.
- The virus can live outside the body for more than seven days.
- It is spread by:
  - Blood-to-blood contact - only needs a tiny amount
  - Bodily fluids
- Hep B is NOT spread by contaminated food or water and cannot be spread casually in the workplace.

## How could your baby catch Hep B?

- From even a very small amount of blood e.g. through contact between open sores or wounds.
- Through other body fluids including saliva e.g. a human bite.
- By sharing any personal items such as a toothbrush with someone infected with Hep B.

## Why vaccinate your baby?

- The Hepatitis B vaccination provides immunity to the disease.
- Hepatitis B is much more likely to develop into a long term infection in people who are infected at birth or when very young.
- Up to 90% of infants infected at birth remain infected for many years – i.e. they become carriers and can infect others.
- Most of the serious complications that can occur with Hep B occur in carriers.

## Hepatitis B vaccine

- The Hep B vaccine is known to be both safe and effective.
- Since 1982 over one billion doses of Hep B vaccine have been given worldwide.
- Side effects are not common - there may be soreness at the injection site and in a very small number of babies, mild fever.

**Please speak to your health professional for any further information.**



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