

## **How will I know if my baby has been protected?**

Your baby's blood will also be tested at 12 months of age to check if they are fully protected and have not become infected with the virus.

**A full vaccination course is 90–95% effective in protecting your baby from long-term hepatitis B infection.**

## **Is the hepatitis B vaccine safe?**

The vaccine is very safe and millions of doses have been given to babies worldwide without serious side effects.

## **Will it be safe to breastfeed my baby?**

Yes – but your baby should still receive a full vaccination course. Although small amounts of the virus have been found in breast milk, there have been no reports of babies becoming infected through

breastfeeding. Taking good care of your nipples to avoid cracking and bleeding, and vaccination of your newborn baby, will reduce the risk.

## **Will hepatitis B infection affect my pregnancy and delivery?**

No, hepatitis B infection will not affect your pregnancy or how you deliver your baby.

**If you have any other questions or concerns, talk to your midwife or doctor.**

## **How can I protect other family members against hepatitis B?**

Hepatitis B can be transmitted within a household and through sexual contact. If you haven't done so already, we would recommend that your partner and household members, including your children, are tested for hepatitis B and then given a course of vaccination to protect them.

## **Useful information**

Northern Ireland Hepatitis B and C Managed Clinical Network  
[www.hepbandcni.net](http://www.hepbandcni.net)

The British Liver Trust  
2 Southampton Road, Ringwood BH24 1HY  
Information line: 0800 652 7330  
General enquiries: 01425 481320  
Fax: 01425 481335  
Email: [info@britishlivertrust.org.uk](mailto:info@britishlivertrust.org.uk)  
Website: [www.britishlivertrust.org.uk](http://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk)



Public Health Agency,  
12–22 Linenhall Street,  
Belfast BT2 8BS.  
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

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# **Hepatitis B: protecting your baby**

## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection caused by the hepatitis B virus. The infection mainly affects the liver, but is present in blood and body fluids. Many people with hepatitis B infection have no symptoms and do not know they are infected. Others have 'flu-like' symptoms and their skin and eyes turn a yellow colour (jaundice). Hepatitis B infection can only be identified by a blood test.

Most adults infected with hepatitis B fully recover, but in some cases the virus will remain in the blood. If this happens, the people affected will develop chronic (lifelong) hepatitis B infection and they can pass the infection on to others. The risk of developing chronic infection depends on the age at which infection occurs. The risk is lowest in adults and highest in babies whose mothers have chronic hepatitis B infection.

Hepatitis B is found all over the world. The virus is spread most commonly from an infected mother to her baby, usually during childbirth. It is estimated that in the UK, about 1 in every 350 people have chronic hepatitis B infection. All pregnant women in the UK are offered a blood test for hepatitis B as part of their antenatal care. All babies born to hepatitis B infected mothers are offered a full hepatitis B vaccination course.



It is important to know that your baby will not be fully protected unless they receive the full course of vaccinations.

## Why is hepatitis B infection serious for babies?

Without treatments such as vaccination, as many as 9 out of 10 babies infected at birth will develop long-lasting infection. These babies are at risk of developing serious liver disease as they grow older and may also pass the infection on to family members and other contacts in the future.

Without vaccination, many babies born to mothers with hepatitis B will become infected.

## What happens if I have hepatitis B and I am pregnant?

In Northern Ireland, all pregnant women infected with hepatitis B are referred to, and seen by, a hepatologist (liver specialist) during pregnancy. You will receive an appointment for the liver clinic in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast.

It is very important that you attend your hepatology (liver clinic) appointment.

Even if you have attended the liver clinic before, it is important that you are seen again as early as possible during your pregnancy.

The liver specialist will carry out some tests to check the health of your liver and the amount of virus (infection) in your body. Depending on the results of

your tests, you may be offered antiviral drugs to take later in your pregnancy. The drugs can lower the amount of virus in your body and reduce the chance of you passing the infection to your baby during delivery. The liver specialist will advise on whether you should have treatment during pregnancy and discuss this with you.

## When should my baby have the hepatitis B vaccine?

All babies of hepatitis B positive mothers are given a hepatitis B vaccination course, starting at birth, to help prevent infection. Your baby should be given the first vaccination shortly after delivery and again at one, two and 12 months of age. They will also be offered a booster dose with their pre-school vaccinations at around 3 years and 4 months old.

Hepatitis B vaccinations are given at:

- birth
- one month of age
- two months of age
- 12 months of age

In some cases, a baby may also be given hepatitis B immunoglobulin (antibodies) at birth. You will be advised if your baby needs immunoglobulin and, if so, your baby will get it at the same time as the first vaccine.

You should be told when and where your baby will get the vaccinations before you leave the hospital, and you should make sure you know this.