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# Immunization : Hepatitis B Vaccine

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This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Vaccines or "needles" are the best way to protect against some very serious infections. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization strongly recommends routine immunizations.

## The Virus

The hepatitis B virus can permanently damage your liver. It's the biggest cause of liver cancer worldwide. You need your liver to digest food and remove waste from your body.

There are around 150 cases of hepatitis B reported in Ontario each year. 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 with hepatitis B. You can get it and not even know it. That means you can infect someone else without knowing.

## How you can catch hepatitis B

You can get hepatitis B through the blood and other body fluids from an infected person. It's primarily a sexually transmitted disease, but you can also pick it up through 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 hepatitis B from someone coughing, or from hugging or using the same dishes.

## Is there a cure?

There is no cure for hepatitis B. Most people get well, but about 10 per cent 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.

## There is prevention

Hepatitis B can be prevented with a series of hepatitis B vaccine.

## Is the vaccine safe?

The vaccine is safe. It's been used in Canada for many years and it's one of the safest vaccines around. It might 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 over 39 C, hives or rashes.

The risk from hepatitis B is much greater than the risk from the vaccine, however, some people should not have this vaccine.

You won't be vaccinated if you have a fever or anything more serious than a minor cold. Tell your doctor if you've had a past allergic reaction to a vaccine. **You should always**

**discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your doctor.**

Who should I talk to if I have any questions?

Talk to your doctor or call your [local public health unit](#).

**Your Record of Protection**

After you get any immunization, make sure your doctor updates your personal immunization record, such as your "Yellow Card". Keep it in a safe place !

**Government of Ontario**

For information about health services and resources :

[www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

For consumer-friendly health tips and information :

[www.HealthyOntario.com](http://www.HealthyOntario.com)

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343;

TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Telehealth Ontario:

1-866-797-0000; TTY 1-866-797-0007

INFOline is open during business hours and can provide general information on healthcare.

Telehealth Ontario is a 24/7 service which uses nurse practitioners to answer your immediate health concerns.