VaxWorks
health services + training

Hepatitis B vaccine

Information Sheet

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver. Vaccination is safe, highly effective and usually requires three doses.

Key points

- Hepatitis B spreads through infected blood and body fluids, including through sex, shared needles or at birth.
- Long-term infection can cause serious liver damage and liver cancer, even without symptoms.
- The vaccine cannot cause hepatitis B. Most adults need three doses over six months.

What is hepatitis B

Hepatitis B can cause a short illness or long-term infection. Symptoms include tiredness, nausea, dark urine and jaundice (yellow skin or eyes). People without symptoms can pass it on.

Who should be vaccinated

Anyone wanting protection can discuss vaccination. It is particularly recommended for non-immune people in these groups:

- workers exposed to blood, body fluids or used needles, including healthcare, emergency, corrections, funeral and skin-piercing work
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or from countries where hepatitis B is common
- household or sexual contacts of someone with hepatitis B
- men who have sex with men, sex workers, people who inject drugs, or people in correctional facilities
- people living with chronic liver disease, hepatitis C, HIV or severe kidney disease, or needing dialysis or a transplant
- people receiving certain blood products or repeated transfusions, or attending disability care facilities
- travellers at increased risk in countries where hepatitis B is common.

How well does the vaccine work

More than 90% of healthy adults develop protective antibodies after a full course. Response may be lower with older age or weakened immunity.

How many doses are needed

Most adults need three doses at 0, 1 and 6 months. If a dose is late, do not restart - complete the remaining doses.

Faster courses are also available but require a fourth dose at 12 months.

Routine boosters are not needed for healthy people who respond to a complete course.

Which vaccines contain hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B vaccines available for adults in Australia include:

- Engerix-B
- H-B-Vax II
- Twinrix protects against both hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

The vaccine offered may depend on your age, medical history, previous doses and product availability.

Do I need blood tests?

Testing before vaccination may identify infection needing care if you are more likely to have had hepatitis B.

An antibody test is recommended 4-8 weeks after the course for some people, particularly health care workers or people with close contact with someone with hepatitis B.

Tell your provider before vaccination

Tell your provider if you have had a severe allergic reaction to a hepatitis B vaccine or an ingredient; have a latex allergy; are pregnant or breastfeeding; are very unwell or have a temperature of 38.5°C or higher; or have a condition or treatment that affects your immune system.

A mild illness without a high fever is usually not a reason to delay. The vaccine is not routinely recommended during pregnancy or breastfeeding, but it can be given when necessary after discussing the benefits and risks.

Possible reactions

Most reactions are mild and short-lived: a sore, red or swollen arm, mild fever, headache, tiredness or nausea. Serious reactions are very rare.

Allergic reactions and when to seek help

Remain at the vaccination location for 15 minutes. Anaphylaxis is very rare but serious. Call 000 for difficulty breathing, tongue or throat swelling, wheezing, persistent dizziness or collapse. For a serious or unexpected reaction, seek medical advice and contact VaxWorks.

If you may have been exposed

Seek advice immediately after a needlestick, blood splash or possible sexual exposure. Vaccine and hepatitis B immunoglobulin may be needed. Seek advice even if more time has passed.

Reference: Australian Immunisation Handbook – Hepatitis B (updated 30 September 2026).

This information sheet was reviewed by VaxWorks Health Services - October 2026.