



What vaccines are recommended for my baby at Birth?

 SKAI : Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation

Most babies get two needles (injections) at birth. One is the hepatitis B vaccine and the other is a vitamin K injection. They are usually given in babies' legs.

Why does my baby need to have a hepatitis B vaccine at birth?

Babies need to have the first hepatitis B vaccination at birth because many people who have hepatitis B don't have any symptoms and don't know they are infected. These people can pass the virus to babies without knowing it. It is possible for a mother to have hepatitis B while she is pregnant and pass it on to her baby during the birth without knowing it. Even mothers who have had blood tests showing no sign of hepatitis B virus can be carrying hepatitis B and pass it on to their babies during the birth.¹

About half of the children who catch hepatitis B get it during their births. People who catch hepatitis B while they are young babies almost always develop serious liver damage (cirrhosis) or cancer as adults and around a quarter of those people die from the disease.¹ The other half catch it in early childhood from other people who carry the virus and may not even know they have it. It is rare for children to catch hepatitis B from other children, but it can happen. This can happen when young children bite one another, touch each other's wounds or 'borrow' other people's toothbrushes.¹

What disease does the vaccine protect babies from?

The vaccine protects babies from hepatitis B, a virus that mostly affects the liver. Hepatitis B often doesn't make children sick when they first get it but it can cause serious liver disease, including cancer, later in life.

How will the vaccine affect my baby?

Newborn babies don't usually have any noticeable reaction to the hepatitis B vaccine after the sting of the needle has passed. New babies who get these injections don't usually get the reactions (like fever or allergic reactions to something in the vaccines) that older babies can get.²

How can I make it easier for my baby?

No matter how gentle your midwife or doctor is, needles hurt and most babies cry at least a little after they get a needle. The good news is that researchers are beginning to understand more about children's pain and have found some things that make needles feel less painful. Breastfeeding relieves babies' pain really well. You can ask your midwives to give your baby's needles during a breastfeed.^{3,4} Holding or cuddling babies, especially skin-to-skin, triggers the release of pain-relieving hormones. So if you aren't able to breastfeed your baby straight after the birth, you can ask one of the midwives to give the needles while you or someone else holds her, preferably undressed and held firmly chest-to-chest in an upright position.^{3,4}

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Are there any rare side effects I need to know about?

Researchers haven't found any serious side effects from the birth dose of the hepatitis B vaccine. Serious side effects do happen when older babies and children get vaccines that include hepatitis B but they are very rare. There is information about them on the SKAI website.

What if my baby is born early?

If your baby is born early (premature) it is even more important to protect them from hepatitis B because their immune system isn't as strong as it would be if they'd been born at term. Your baby's vaccination might need to be delayed for a short time and they may need an extra dose. You can ask your baby's medical team what they recommend.

Why is my baby getting two needles at birth?

Most babies get two needles (injections) at birth. One is the hepatitis B vaccine and the other is a vitamin K injection. Vitamin K is not a vaccine. Babies usually get a vitamin K injection in their leg shortly after birth. Vitamin K helps prevent a condition called vitamin K deficiency bleeding by helping the baby's blood to clot. Vitamin K can also be given as drops in the mouth (oral vitamin K drops) over several days. Most health professionals recommend the vitamin K injection because it only needs to be given once.⁵ There is some more information about vitamin K and vitamin K deficiency bleeding disorder on the Australian College of Midwives' website (midwives.org.au).

Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information about childhood vaccination or the diseases they protect children from you can:

- go to the SKAI website, talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au
- or you can write your questions in the space below and ask your doctor or nurse when you see them.

What is next?

When your baby is six weeks old, it is recommended they have three vaccines: a combination DTPahepB-IPV-Hib vaccine, a 13vPCV vaccine, and a rotavirus vaccine. All together, these vaccines protect children against eight diseases. Two of the vaccines are needles, usually given in the baby's legs. The rotavirus vaccine is given as drops put into your baby's mouth to swallow. It is important that babies and children get vaccinated on time to make sure they are protected as early as possible.

What questions would you like answered before getting your baby's needles?

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I have no questions

References

1. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health: Canberra, 2018.
2. Lewis E, Shinefield HR, Woodruff BA, Black SB, Destefano F, Chen RT, et al. Safety of neonatal hepatitis B vaccine administration. *Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*. 2001;20:1049- 54.
3. Pain management strategies for childhood immunisation. In *Handbook of Non-Drug Interventions* Royal Australian College of General Practitioners: 2018.
4. Taddio A, et al. Reducing pain during vaccine injections: clinical practice guideline. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2015;187:975-982.
5. Joint statement and recommendations on vitamin K administration to newborn infants to prevent vitamin K deficiency bleeding in infancy. Commonwealth of Australia. 2010.

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