

# Important Information about Hepatitis B and Hepatitis B Vaccine

## PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY

### What Is Hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver.
- It can cause permanent liver damage and scarring. In some cases it can be life threatening.
- It is the number one cause of liver cancer in the world.
- Some people who get hepatitis B are very sick, with fever, a yellow colour skin and eyes (jaundice), vomiting, and pain in the abdomen.
- About half the people who are infected with hepatitis B never feel sick, and they can spread the disease without knowing it.
- Hepatitis B is caused by contact with infected blood or body fluids. This can happen in one of the following ways:
  - through a break in the skin such as a cut, bleeding gums, needle stick, or tattoo
  - by sharing needles, toothbrushes, or razors
  - during unprotected sexual contact
  - during birth, from a mother who has the virus
- It is preventable through immunization.
- You cannot catch the virus from sneezes, coughs, or hugs or by using the same dishes as someone with hepatitis B.

### What Is Hepatitis B Vaccine?

- Hepatitis B vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine that provides protection against hepatitis B virus.
- It contains no blood or living virus. It has been in use in Canada for more than 20 years.

### Who Should Receive the Hepatitis B Vaccine?

- In Nova Scotia, immunization is offered to children in the School Immunization Program to ensure that they are protected well before they may be exposed to the disease.

## CAUTION

### Who Should Not Receive the Hepatitis B Vaccine?

- People who have already received hepatitis B or Twinrix vaccine. If your child was born outside of Nova Scotia, check their immunization records to see if they have already received hepatitis B immunization.
- People who have had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose or any component of hepatitis B vaccine.
- People who are sick or have a fever (temperature of 39.5°C/103°F or greater).

# What to Expect Following Immunization with the **Hepatitis B Vaccine**

## INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Your child has received a dose of hepatitis B vaccine. This vaccine protects your child from the hepatitis B virus.

Your child must have both shots to get the full protection. There should be about 6 months between the first and second shots. This is the schedule that works best.

If the second shot is late, the Public Health Nurse will determine when it can be given.

If your child misses either shot, please contact the Public Health Services office near you to make other arrangements with a school Public Health Nurse.

*People should stay in the clinic for at least 15 minutes after receiving any type of immunization to monitor possible reaction. As with any vaccine there is a slight possibility that a more serious reaction could occur.*

### **What Are the Possible Side Effects from the Vaccine?**

Side effects are very uncommon. However, some people may experience

- pain, swelling, and redness at the injection site (this usually lasts for only a short time following immunization)
- fever

*As fever may occur, make sure you have acetaminophen or ibuprofen at home. Follow the instructions that come with the product. These medications should not be taken if you have certain medical conditions. Talk to your health care provider about your medical history before using either of these medications.*

### **Call Your Health Care Provider If**

- The fever lasts longer than 24 hours.
- Your child's temperature is 39.5°C (103°F) or greater.
- The fever does not come down after the acetaminophen or ibuprofen is taken.

### **Questions?**

If you have any questions about hepatitis B or the hepatitis B vaccine, please call your local Public Health office or your health care provider.

For more information on immunization, please visit the websites of

- Immunize Canada at [immunize.ca](http://immunize.ca)
- the Public Health Agency of Canada at [phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://phac-aspc.gc.ca)
- 811 at <https://811.novascotia.ca/>