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## Fact Checked: Hepatitis B Vaccine Given to Newborns Reduces Risk of Chronic Infection

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### The Claim in Context

Immunizing newborns against hepatitis B is critical to reduce chronic hepatitis B later in life. False claims that call this benefit into question jeopardize the health of children. The U.S. has made significant progress in reducing chronic hepatitis B, largely due to the birth dose and completion of the infant series, and eliminating the birth dose would reverse this progress and lead to more cases of perinatally acquired hepatitis B and hepatitis B infections throughout childhood.

### Key Facts

- Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease. Chronic infection over the course of a lifetime can lead to liver damage, liver failure, liver cancer, or even death.
- Hepatitis B is transmitted through blood or body fluids, and perinatal exposure typically occurs during labor and delivery.
- Newborns can acquire hepatitis B at birth (perinatal hepatitis B) if the mother is infected with the hepatitis B virus. Administering a hepatitis B vaccine within 24 hours of birth, known as a birth dose, is highly effective in preventing infection in newborns.

- Adults with an infection may not be aware they carry the virus. It is highly contagious and can be transmitted while caring for an infant after birth. A birth dose of the hepatitis B vaccine and completion of the vaccines series in infancy also helps protect older infants and children from exposure to the virus by other caregivers and others, known as horizontal transmission.
- Newborns respond well to a birth dose of the hepatitis B vaccine, and after completing the full 3 to 4-dose vaccine series, 98% of healthy infants achieve full immunity to the virus.
- Newborns infected with hepatitis B at birth and infants infected in the first year of life [have a 90% chance of developing chronic hepatitis B, and 25% of those who develop chronic hepatitis B will die from the disease.](#)
- Children infected between one and five years of age have a 25-50% chance of becoming chronically infected. Twenty-five percent of children who develop a chronic hepatitis B infection will die from the disease.

## Evidence Snapshot

The hepatitis B vaccine has been tested extensively for safety and efficacy, and when administered within 24 hours of birth it is highly effective in preventing newborn infection.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), from 2011–2019, rates of reported cases of acute hepatitis B remained low among children and adolescents aged 0–19 years and among people aged 20–29 years, likely explained, in part, because of the implementation of childhood hepatitis B vaccine recommendations published by the CDC in 1991. As the cohort of people who were vaccinated as children has grown older, rates of acute hepatitis B among people aged 30–39 years began to consistently decrease, beginning in 2015.

## Why It Matters

Hepatitis B can lead to serious lifelong illnesses or even death, and a hepatitis B birth dose provides a critical safety net protecting infants from acquiring a potentially serious infection at the time of birth. Late-stage hepatitis B can lead to cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer.

The U.S. is currently on track to eliminating perinatal hepatitis B, with only 17 reported cases in 2021 and 13 in 2022. However, eliminating the birth dose would jeopardize this progress.

## **Experts Say:**

*"The Hepatitis B vaccine is one of the most important steps we can take to protect babies in their first 24 hours of life. Hepatitis B, if untreated, can lead to serious complications, including liver cancer. Many adults with Hepatitis B do not look or feel sick, and may not be aware they could transmit the virus to an infant they are caring for. Vaccinating*

*newborns provides a  
critical safety net for  
children.”*

— **James Campbell MD, FAAP**, member  
of AAP’s Committee on Infectious  
Diseases

## Resources for Further Information

### **2024-2027 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases (33rd Edition)**

Source: AAP Red Book

### **Elimination of Perinatal Hepatitis B: Providing the First Vaccine Dose Within 24 Hours of Birth**

Source: AAP Pediatrics

# How Do Children Get Hepatitis?

Source: [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)

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**Source** American Academy of Pediatrics

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