



# Hepatitis B

**H**epatitis B vaccination became part of the childhood immunisation schedule on 1 May 2000. It is recommended for babies at birth, 2, 4 and 6 months. It is also recommended for adolescents born before 1 May 2000 and is now offered to children in Year 7 as part of the NSW adolescent school based program (since 2004).

## Why do we need the vaccine?

There is an urgent need to control the pool of hepatitis B carriers due to the severity of the disease as it progresses. In the early stages of hepatitis B infection, there are usually no symptoms. Major complications occur only after many years.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates more than one third of the world's population have been infected with hepatitis B virus. Most have recovered, but there are around 350 million chronic carriers of the hepatitis B virus. This is about 5% of the world's population.

About a quarter of these carriers will develop serious liver disease, including chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis (scarring), and cancer. The WHO estimates that hepatitis B infection results in more than one million deaths every year. It recommends all countries incorporate the vaccine into their routine immunisation programs to prevent increasing the number of chronic carriers.



## How does hepatitis B spread?

It is a blood borne virus that is transferred through blood and other bodily fluids. It can be spread through sexual intercourse and injecting drug use.

Hepatitis B is 100 times more infectious than HIV and yet simple vaccination can reduce this risk significantly.

## Why immunise children?

The advantage of immunising children is to decrease the number of hepatitis carriers before people become sexually active. Children often bite or scratch each other and hepatitis B can be transmitted through contact between open sores and wounds.

## Is the vaccine safe and effective?

Yes. More than one billion doses of hepatitis B vaccine have been used worldwide since 1981, with an outstanding record of safety, and 95% effectiveness.

To organise hepatitis B vaccination for your child, make an appointment with your doctor, who will be able to answer any additional questions you may have.

*For more information please see your doctor or visit the following website: [www.vaccination.org.au](http://www.vaccination.org.au).*

