

Birth-dose hepatitis B vaccinations safe, effective and necessary

23 September 2025

Hepatitis Australia and ASHM are reminding all Australians of the importance of hepatitis B vaccinations to protect the health and wellbeing of children.

Hepatitis B is a virus which can lead to acute or chronic hepatitis B conditions, with the latter being associated with increased risk of liver damage and liver cancer.

Since 2000, the birth-dose hepatitis B vaccine has been recommended, and is provided for free under Australia's National Immunisation Program. Currently, four hepatitis B vaccinations are recommended before six months of age, with the first being preferably within 24 hours of birth when medically stable. Protection against hepatitis B is almost always long-lasting, and the birth-dose is tolerated very well by newborn babies.

"Birthdose vaccination is one of the strongest and most effective tools we have to prevent babies and children from developing chronic hepatitis B. Hepatitis B can have profound lifelong health impacts and increases the risk of potentially fatal liver cancer," says Lucy Clynes, CEO of Hepatitis Australia. "The risk of developing chronic hepatitis B is around 90 per cent for babies who are exposed to hepatitis B. Any unnecessary delay to childhood hepatitis B vaccination creates an unacceptable and avoidable risk of chronic hepatitis B."

Under the childhood vaccination program, 93% of one-year-olds have been immunised against hepatitis B as of June 2025. Childhood hepatitis B vaccination has supported a 60% decline in hepatitis B notifications in Australia in people aged under 20 between 2014 and 2023.

"We know that childhood vaccinations work," said Alexis Apostolellis, CEO of ASHM. "Australia has shown great progress towards the elimination of hepatitis B transmission, particularly in children and adolescents. It is vital that all healthcare professionals continue to follow evidence-based clinical guidance in their practice."

Healthcare professionals can view the latest recommended hepatitis B immunisation schedule for children, including state and territory-specific guidance, in the National Immunisation Program (NIP) Schedule. Further evidence-based guidance around hepatitis B prevention and vaccinations can be found on ASHM's B Positive web portal: <https://hepatitisb.org.au/primary-prevention-of-hepatitis-b-virus-infection/>

Anyone seeking further information about hepatitis B, including vaccination can call HepLink on 1800 437 222.

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About Hepatitis Australia

Hepatitis Australia is the peak community organisation to progress national action on issues of importance to people affected by hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Its members are the eight state and territory hepatitis organisations.

www.hepatitisaustralia.com

About ASHM

ASHM is a peak professional body representing healthcare professionals working in viral hepatitis, HIV, other blood-borne viruses (BBVs), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and sexual and reproductive health.

<https://ashm.org.au>