

Why Give the Hepatitis B Birthdose?

Hepatitis B vaccine is currently recommended to be administered to all infants at the time of birth and before hospital discharge. A universal policy to vaccinate all infants for hepatitis B at birth acts as a safety net and reduces the risk for perinatal infection.

Hepatitis B Birthdose Acts a Safety Net When

- A pregnant woman is hepatitis B (HBsAg) positive but her status is not communicated to the nursery; is misinterpreted, or is mistranscribed in her prenatal records.
- A chronically infected woman is tested by mistake for hepatitis B surface antibody (anti-HBs or HBsAb) instead of HBsAg.
- A pregnant woman is not tested for HBsAg prenatally or in hospital at time of delivery.
- A high-risk woman tests negative early in pregnancy but develops hepatitis B infection later in pregnancy.
- A mother is HBsAg negative but the infant is exposed postnatally from another family member or caregiver. This accounts for two-thirds of childhood transmission.

Example from a Kansas Hospital

Recently, an infant was born to a mother who had no prenatal care and was not tested for hepatitis B prior to delivery. As a result, the local hospital tested her for hepatitis B and administered the birthdose of hepatitis B vaccine to the infant. Both mother and infant were discharged before the hepatitis B positive test results were reported. According to CDC, infants born to hepatitis B positive mothers should receive both hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) within 12 hours of birth. If the mother's hepatitis B status is unknown then vaccinate the infant and administer HBIG within 7 days of birth. After the laboratory results were reported the infant received HBIG at 4 days of birth.

This infant and those born to hepatitis B positive mothers should receive the 2nd and 3rd doses of hepatitis B vaccine according to schedule and then test for protective antibody levels and disease 3-9 months after complete of hepatitis B vaccine series.

Resources

- Labor & Delivery and Nursery Unit Guidelines
<http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p2130per.pdf>
- “Recommended Childhood and Adolescent Immunization Schedule 2005”
<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/child-schedule.pdf>
- Give the Birth Dose
<http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p2125.pdf>
- Hepatitis B Virus: A Comprehensive Strategy for Eliminating Transmission in the United States Through Universal Childhood Vaccination: Recommendations of the Immunization Practices Advisory Committee (ACIP)
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00033405.htm>