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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To: Health Care Providers
From: Dr. Puthiery Va, Maine CDC Director
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Recommendations for Hepatitis B Immunization

Summary

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) continues to recommend all newborns receive a first dose of hepatitis B vaccine within 24 hours of delivery and complete a three-dose series by age 18 months. The Maine CDC's guidance for hepatitis B vaccination practices is based on the evidence-based recommendations from the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#), [American Medical Association \(AMA\)](#), and [American Academy of Family Physicians \(AAFP\)](#). Vaccination remains the best defense against hepatitis B.

Background

Timely vaccination for hepatitis B is a vital public health measure, ensuring all infants are protected as soon as possible after birth, and serves as a critical safety net essential to protecting the health of the youngest and most vulnerable in the population. The universal vaccination recommendation for newborns has been in place since 1991. The birth dose offers a proven, safe, and dependable layer of protection against maternal infections and potential exposure from caregivers or household members with hepatitis B.

Maine CDC Recommendations:

The Maine CDC continues to recommend the following to Maine health care providers:

- All newborns should receive a hepatitis B vaccine within 24 hours of birth, with additional doses at 1-2 months and 6-18 months.

- **Newborns born to birth parents who test positive for hepatitis B infection or have an unknown status should receive a hepatitis B vaccine and be given hepatitis B immunoglobulin within 12 hours of birth.**
- **All children should complete the full 3-dose hepatitis B vaccination series within 18 months.**
- **Children who are not fully vaccinated by 18 months should follow the [AAP's age appropriate catch up schedule](#).**
- **This recommendation stands regardless of serological testing. At this time, there are no data to support the use of serology as an indicator of lifelong protection after one dose. Serological testing is not an established method to determine whether the full vaccine series should be given.**

Maine's Vaccines for Children program will continue to provide the hepatitis vaccine.

Hepatitis B Infection

- Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease, including cirrhosis, liver failure, liver cancer, and death.
- Perinatal transmission of hepatitis B can occur if the birthing person is infected. Hepatitis B screening during pregnancy to identify those with the disease before delivery is recommended by the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) and the United States Preventive Services Task Force. However, challenges and errors still occur:
 - In some cases, birthing parents who have hepatitis B may be unaware of their status, resulting in information not being reported or being inaccurately reported to the delivery facility.
 - Hepatitis B laboratory reports may be misinterpreted. Negative antibody tests can be mistaken for negative antigen results, leading to inaccurate documentation.
 - Birthing parents without known risk factors who test negative during screening early in pregnancy may acquire hepatitis B between testing and delivery or may have a false-negative initial test if the infection is new.
- Horizontal Transmission: Infants and children can contract hepatitis B from caregivers, household contacts, and others with known or unknown hepatitis B infection, or from surfaces and objects contaminated with blood containing hepatitis B virus.
 - Up to 2.4 million people are estimated to have hepatitis B infection in the United States, among whom an estimated 50% are unaware of their infection.
 - Hepatitis B is a resilient virus and can live on surfaces such as toothbrushes, washcloths, and nail clippers for up to 7 days.
- Hepatitis B infection is particularly devastating to infants.
 - Of infants infected with Hepatitis B virus in the first year of life, 90% develop chronic hepatitis B infection.
 - One in four people infected with hepatitis B virus during childhood die from liver cirrhosis or liver cancer in later life.

Hepatitis B Vaccination

- The birth dose and completion of the vaccine series within the first 18 months of life, regardless of the hepatitis B infection status of the birth parent, is essential to reducing the risk of chronic hepatitis B and related sequelae.
- Risk-based vaccination strategies (e.g., vaccinating only babies born to parents known to have hepatitis B) have historically been insufficient to prevent perinatal early childhood transmission.

- Maine identified 109 hepatitis B positive mothers and referred perinatal cases between 2015-2025.
 - The last reported case of perinatal transmission of hepatitis B in Maine was in 2021.
- Safety and efficacy of the vaccine have been well-established.
 - The hepatitis B vaccine is 80–100% effective in preventing infection or clinical hepatitis in those who receive the complete vaccine series.
 - Hepatitis B vaccine has a strong safety profile, with adverse effects that are typically mild and transient. According to post-licensure surveillance, the most frequently reported reactions include localized pain, erythema, or swelling at the injection site, as well as low-grade fever and fatigue, all of which generally resolve within 24–48 hours. Severe adverse reactions are estimated to occur at a rate of 1.1 per million doses, consistent with the overall rate of anaphylaxis to vaccines.

Resources

- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP)
- [American Academy of Family Physicians](#) (AAFP)
- [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) (ACOG)
- [American Medical Association](#) (AMA)