

Quick Facts About Hepatitis B Virus and Pregnancy

- Hepatitis B is caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). The virus can pass from a pregnant person with hepatitis B to the baby during pregnancy and delivery.
- Preventive steps can be taken to greatly reduce the risk of infection in a baby born to a person with hepatitis B.
- Hepatitis B can occur without any symptoms.
- All pregnant people should be tested for HBV early in pregnancy.
- There is no cure for hepatitis B, but antiviral medication can help decrease the risk of long-term health problems.
- A planned cesarean delivery is not necessary for pregnant people with hepatitis B.
- Breastfeeding is safe for people with hepatitis B.
- Your baby will need to complete the hepatitis B vaccine series on schedule and have a blood test to make sure they are protected against hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B is a serious liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). While there is no cure for hepatitis B, treatment is available that can manage the infection and reduce the risk of long-term health problems. A safe and effective **vaccine** is also available to protect against hepatitis B infection.

HBV spreads through contact with blood or other body fluids from a person with hepatitis B, including saliva, semen, and vaginal fluids. HBV can also pass from mother to baby during pregnancy and delivery. However, steps can be taken to greatly reduce the risk of infection in babies born to people with hepatitis B.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B virus can cause a chronic (long-lasting) liver infection. The liver is a major organ that helps the body get rid of toxins and makes important proteins.

When an adult first gets hepatitis B, they may have symptoms like fever, nausea, tiredness, stomach pain, or yellowish color changes of the skin and eyes

(**jaundice**). Most infants with hepatitis B do not show any symptoms.

In most adults with hepatitis B, the virus goes away without treatment. About 5% will develop chronic hepatitis B infection. Babies with hepatitis B have a much higher risk of chronic infection. Up to 90% of infants who get HBV during pregnancy or delivery will go on to develop chronic hepatitis B. Left untreated, about 1

in 4 children with chronic hepatitis B will eventually die of health problems related to their infection, such as liver damage, liver disease, or liver cancer.

How is HBV Spread?

HBV is spread by contact with the blood or body fluids of a person with hepatitis B. The virus can also pass from a pregnant person with hepatitis B to the baby either during pregnancy or during delivery.

Is there a test for hepatitis B?

Yes. All pregnant people should be tested for hepatitis B during each pregnancy with a simple blood test.

Is there a vaccine to protect against hepatitis B?

A vaccine is available to protect against hepatitis B. It is recommended for all infants at birth, children not vaccinated as babies, adults aged 19 to 59, and adults over 60 with certain risk factors. Pregnant people who haven't been vaccinated against hepatitis B infection can also get the hepatitis B vaccine. There is no virus in the hepatitis B vaccine, and it is safe for both the pregnant person and the baby.

How could having hepatitis B affect my pregnancy?

The main concern during pregnancy and delivery is that HBV may be passed to the baby. The chance of this happening is related to the **viral load**, which is the amount of HBV in your blood. Your healthcare professional will monitor your viral load throughout your pregnancy with blood tests. If you have a very high viral load, treatment with **antiviral medication** may be recommended in the third trimester of pregnancy. This treatment will help lower the level of HBV in your body and decrease the chances of the virus passing to the baby. If your viral load is low, the baby will still receive preventive treatment after delivery to prevent infection.

How is HBV infection treated during pregnancy?

If you have hepatitis B and are pregnant, you will have ongoing tests of your liver function and your viral levels. You may be referred to a **maternal-fetal medicine subspecialist** or hepatologist (liver specialist) for specialized care. If you are already being treated for hepatitis B when you get pregnant, your healthcare professional will review your current medications to make sure they are safe during pregnancy. If you have been taking tenofovir acetate fumarate (TAF) or tenofovir disoproxil fumarate (TDF) to treat hepatitis B before pregnancy, you can continue taking it throughout pregnancy. Entecavir (Baraclude) is not recommended for use during pregnancy.

Will I need to have a cesarean delivery?

A planned **cesarean delivery** isn't necessary if you have hepatitis B. Vaginal delivery does not appear to increase the risk of the baby getting the virus. Certain measures will be taken at the time of delivery to decrease the risk to the baby.

Can I breastfeed?

Yes, you can breastfeed if you have hepatitis B. However, if your nipples bleed while breastfeeding, you will need to discard the milk from the bleeding breast to avoid exposing the baby to HBV.

You can also safely breastfeed if you are taking antiviral medication to treat hepatitis B.

Is there a way to prevent my baby from getting hepatitis B?

The following steps can be taken to greatly reduce the risk of infection in babies born to moms with hepatitis B:

1. Immediate post-birth care: Babies born to mothers with hepatitis B should receive a medication

called **hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG)** and a dose of the hepatitis B vaccine within 12 hours of birth.

2. Completing the hepatitis B vaccine series: Babies should get the hepatitis B vaccine series on schedule. The hepatitis B vaccine series is given in 2 or 3 doses (depending on the type of vaccine given) over a few months. The baby needs all recommended doses in addition to the dose given at birth to be as protected as possible.
3. Testing: Babies should be tested for hepatitis B between 9 and 12 months of age. Testing can show whether the baby is protected, infected, or still at risk for infection.

What happens if testing shows my baby has hepatitis B despite these preventive steps?

Even with these preventive steps, about 1 in 10 babies become infected with HBV. Your baby will need special care to manage the disease. When bringing the baby home, precautions should be taken to avoid passing the virus to others.

What precautions need to be taken in the home to prevent passing HBV to others?

Your family and household members should know how HBV is passed from one person to another and take steps to prevent infection spread. All of your family and household members should be tested for hepatitis B. They should get the hepatitis B vaccine if they do not currently have hepatitis B but are not **immune** to it.

What other things do I need to know about hepatitis B?

- Anyone with hepatitis B should be tested for hepatitis A virus (HAV) and get vaccinated if they've never had it before. The hepatitis A vaccine can be given during pregnancy. Hepatitis A can cause more serious liver damage in a person with hepatitis B.
- People with hepatitis B need to avoid all alcohol, even when not pregnant.

Glossary

Antiviral Medications: Drugs that treat viral infections.

Cesarean Delivery: Surgery in which a baby is delivered through a cut (incision) in the mother's uterus.

HBV Immunoglobulin (HBIG): A medication containing antibodies used to prevent HBV infection in people exposed to the virus.

Immune: Being resistant to a specific disease because the body has made antibodies against it, either through vaccination or having the disease before.

Jaundice: A yellowish coloration of the skin and whites of the eyes caused by too much bilirubin in the bloodstream.

Maternal-fetal medicine subspecialist: An obstetrician with specialized training in prenatal care for people with high-risk pregnancies.

Vaccine: A substance containing parts of an inactivated or killed version of a disease-causing agent that causes a person's immune system to make antibodies that fight the disease.

Viral Load: The amount of a virus in a person's body.

To find a maternal-fetal medicine subspecialist in your area, go to <https://www.smfm.org/members/search>

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