

# HEPATITIS B VACCINATION

## It's 100 times more infectious than HIV!

### Information about Hepatitis B infection

#### 1. What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver - it is highly infectious and can be very serious. The good news is, a vaccination is available to protect you from getting infected with hepatitis B. The vaccines are safe and effective and are available from the Genitourinary Medicine and Sexual Health clinics. Your employer may arrange for you to have the vaccines if you need to have them because of the job that you do.

#### 2. What happens if I catch hepatitis B infection?

*In the early stages, an infected person may develop the following:-*

- jaundice - the skin and the whites of the eyes become yellow
- mild fever, aching muscles & joints
- feeling or being sick, diarrhoea, abdominal pain & loss of appetite
- tiredness & depression

*In the later stages, the following may develop:-*

- chronic hepatitis i.e. continuing inflammation of the liver
- cirrhosis & liver failure
- cancer of the liver

**However, many people report no symptoms at all.**

#### 3. How can you catch the hepatitis B virus?

Hepatitis B can be passed from one person to another in the following ways:-

- Sexual contact including vaginal, oral and anal intercourse
- Blood e.g. from needles and equipment used by injecting drug users
- From mother to baby at the time of birth
- Bodily fluids e.g. saliva (but this is rare)

#### 4. How do I know if I have this infection now or if I have had it in the past?

- A test can be done at your first visit to the clinic.
- These results will tell you if you have ever had the infection, and if you have, we can tell you if the virus is still in your system and you are a "carrier" i.e. if you can pass the virus on to other people.
- Some carriers may seem healthy but they can remain infectious for many years.
- If you have had the infection and your body has developed its own natural protection to fight against the effects of the virus, then you may not be a carrier - in this case, you are "immune" and you will not need to have the vaccines.
- If you are not immune, then we can offer you a full course of the vaccines.



**HEPATITIS B  
VACCINATION  
INFORMATION**



## **Information about Hepatitis B vaccination**

### **1. How can we prevent the spread of this infection?**

- By vaccination.
- Spread of the infection can also be reduced by safer sex and by the use of condoms.
- Babies born to mothers who have the virus, can have vaccinations to help reduce their chances of developing the disease.

### **2. Should I have the vaccine?**

The vaccine is recommended for the following people:

- Injecting drug users
- Men who have sex with men
- Commercial sex workers
- People with HIV and hepatitis C
- Individuals from high risk countries e.g. Asia, Africa
- Individuals who have been sexually assaulted
- People having tattoos and body piercings
- Sexual contacts of the above groups
- Certain high risk occupations e.g. healthcare workers, police

**NOTE:** You should not have the vaccine if you have a severe illness with a high temperature until you have recovered.

### **3. How does the vaccine work?**

- The vaccine helps your own body's natural defence mechanisms, the "immune system", to make protective antibodies which can fight the virus, if it comes into contact with the virus in the future.
- You cannot "catch" hepatitis B infection itself from the vaccine because it is not a live vaccine.

### **4. How is it given?**

- The vaccinations consist of 3 or 4 injections and you need to have all of the injections to become properly protected.
- We can start the course at the first visit.
- It is given as an injection into a muscle in your upper arm.
- Some people may need a booster dose.

### **5. Are there any side effects associated with this vaccine?**

Most people have very few problems. Some people may notice the following symptoms, but these are not very common:-

- soreness, redness or bruising around the site of the injection
- fever, rash, tiredness, aching joints and muscles, and flu-like symptoms.
- allergic reactions e.g. a rash or shortness of breath.
- rarely, nervous system problems have been reported, but it has not been proven if these are due to the vaccine.

### **6. If I am or may be pregnant, should I have the vaccine?**

- Hepatitis B infection in pregnant women can be a very serious disease and therefore the vaccine may be given to some women if they are at high risk of this infection.
- If you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant then you must inform the doctor or nurse before you have the vaccine.

### **7. How do I know if the vaccine has worked?**

- A test is usually done about 12 weeks after the final vaccine.
- About 10 days later, we will tell you if the vaccine has worked.
- If the results show that you have no protection, then we will offer you further booster doses of the vaccine.

### **8. I have been told that I am not immune and the vaccine has not worked, what does this mean?**

- This means that you are not protected.
- If you are exposed to the hepatitis B virus in the future, then it is possible that you may become infected. If this is the case, then you are advised to seek medical attention as soon as possible, because you may be able to have a different type of vaccine – this is called "hepatitis B immunoglobulin". For this treatment to be effective, it needs to be given ideally within 48 hours of exposure – if it is more than 7 days after you have been exposed, then it is unlikely to protect you.

If you have any other questions about this vaccination, please contact Conifer House, 32-36 Prospect Street, Hull, on 01482 336336 for further information.