

Hepatitis B protection now part of routine baby vaccine

All babies born on or after 1 August 2017 are now being offered protection against hepatitis B as part of the universal childhood immunisation programme. This Hexavalent vaccine replaces the existing 5-in-1 vaccine that children routinely get.

Routine immunisation schedule

There has been no change to the immunisation schedule or to the number of injections – children will continue to be immunised at the ages of 8, 12 and 16 weeks.

The only change is to the components of the vaccine itself, which now provides extra protection for hepatitis B, as well as protecting against:

- diphtheria
- tetanus
- whooping cough (pertussis)
- polio
- haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)

It is already widely used with around 150 million doses having been given in 97 countries in Europe and across the world.

You can find out more about the vaccine at these links:

As adults are the majority of infected people, vaccinating children will help protect them in childhood from potential exposure to infected household or family members.

Vaccinating infants will essentially reduce the risk of infection and will provide longer term protection against future exposure risks.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is spread by contact with the blood or bodily fluids of an infected person. It can cause liver cirrhosis and cancer.

[Hepatitis B](#) can be passed on:

- through having unprotected sex
- from mother to baby
- from contact with infected blood in areas of the world where hepatitis B is more common

You cannot get hepatitis B by shaking hands, coughing, sneezing, sharing food, or by using the same toilet.

People with hepatitis B infection may not be aware that they are infected as chronic infection mostly has no symptoms.

If you think you may have been exposed to the virus, even if this was many years ago, talk to [your GP](#) or nurse and get tested.

More useful links

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[Health benefits of breastfeeding babies](#)

Breastfeeding has many important health benefits for both mother and baby. Any period of breastfeeding, however short, will benefit your baby. People are being asked to show support for mums who breastfeed in public.

Benefits of breastfeeding

From the moment a mother starts to breastfeed, both baby and mum will begin to feel the benefits to their health and well-being.

Antibodies in breast milk help protect babies from infection and other illnesses including:

- stomach infections, vomiting and diarrhoea
- ear and chest infections
- kidney infections
- asthma
- eczema
- sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- childhood diabetes
- childhood obesity

Mums who breastfeed are at a statistically lower risk of developing:

- breast cancer
- ovarian cancer
- osteoporosis (bone thinning)
- type 2 diabetes

You can find out more on the [breastfeeding](#) page.

Breastfeeding in public

For many mums, getting started isn't easy and that's why support is crucial.

This includes making mums feel more comfortable about feeding in public, as this is something that many mums are apprehensive about.

A mum breastfeeding is normal, no matter where it happens, and is not something a mum needs to say sorry for.

The ['Breastfeeding Welcome Here'](#) scheme aims to help mums feel more comfortable about feeding their baby in public.

There are now more than 700 businesses, council facilities, and popular local attractions signed up to the scheme. They display a sticker and certificate in their premises to let mums know that they are welcome to feed in all areas and will not be asked to stop breastfeeding.

Staff are also made aware that they are to be supportive of mothers on the premises.

You can find a list and map of 'Breastfeeding Welcome Here' places, along with other advice about breastfeeding, on the [Breastfed Babies website](#).

More useful links

[Apply for school uniform grant](#)

Date published: 01 August 2017

The new term might not start for a few more weeks, but parents may already be thinking about getting their children ready for school. Grants are available to help with buying school uniforms for certain pupils. Find out if you're eligible for a grant.

Clothing allowance

The Clothing Allowance Scheme covers pupils in primary, post-primary and special schools. It does not apply to pupils at nursery schools, nursery units or reception classes.

The eligibility criteria are similar to those used for free school meals and seeks to support families who are on benefits or on low incomes. To find out more about the grant and to see if you can apply, see the page below:

The [Education Authority](#) is responsible for the administration of the scheme.

More useful links

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Get tested if at risk of hepatitis infection

Anyone who thinks they may be at risk from hepatitis B or C infection is reminded to get tested. Hepatitis B and C viruses can remain undetected in the body for a long time and can cause severe liver disease many years after infection.

How is hepatitis transmitted?

Viral [hepatitis](#) is a group of infectious diseases known as hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E. Although not very common in Northern Ireland, it is estimated 400 million people across the globe are infected.

The two main types of hepatitis are B and C. Both of these are spread by contact with the blood or bodily fluids of an infected person. They can cause liver cirrhosis and cancer.

[Hepatitis B](#) can be passed on:

- through having unprotected sex
- from mother to baby
- from contact with infected blood in areas of the world where hepatitis B is more common

[Hepatitis C](#) is more commonly associated with sharing needles or equipment for injecting drugs. It can also be spread by having had a tattoo or body piercing using non-sterile equipment.

Neither virus is easily spread through day-to-day contact. You cannot get hepatitis B or C by shaking hands, coughing, sneezing, sharing food, or by using the same toilet.

People are encouraged to come forward for testing if they have ever injected

drugs, including steroids or tanning products, even if it was only once or some time ago.

Avoiding infection

It is important to know how to avoid becoming infected with hepatitis. This includes:

- practising safer sex
- avoiding getting tattoos abroad
- not sharing personal materials that may come into contact with blood (for example, needles, razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers)

Injecting equipment can be obtained from various needle exchange sites across Northern Ireland to reduce the risk from these infections.

Treatment

Treatments are getting better all the time, so it is worth knowing if you have been infected. It is also important to protect your family if you are infected.

The treatments for hepatitis C are now so good they can cure nearly 100 per cent of cases. If you're treated straight away, not only can you prevent your liver becoming damaged, but you can reduce the chance of spreading the disease to others.

So, if you think you may have been exposed to the virus, even if this was many years ago, talk to [your GP](#) or nurse and get tested.

More useful links

[Child safety on farms](#)

Farms can be one of the most dangerous 'playgrounds' for children, particularly during the summer months. Farming families and visitors are being reminded to be extra careful.

Increased risks

The summer poses increased risks to children, as they typically spend more time on the farm during what is a very busy and potentially hazardous period. Various contractors may be on site operating potentially dangerous vehicles and machinery.

Some of the main risks include:

- moving vehicles such as tractors, quads and harvesters
- farm animals
- infectious diseases
- harmful substances
- slurry tanks and slurry gas
- falling objects

You can find out more about farm safety, with further links through to relevant information, on the pages below:

Farm safety checklist for parents

As a parent:

- do you have a safe and secure play area for young children?
- do you prevent children from playing in or around farmyards and livestock?
- do you prevent all children under 13 years from riding on tractors and farm machinery?
- do you restrict the use of the quad to people over 16 who are properly trained and have the suitable safety equipment?
- do you secure all heavy wheels, gates, heavy equipment and stacked materials to prevent them from toppling over?
- is your slurry lagoon securely fenced to prevent children from gaining access and do you make sure tank covers are always in place?
- do you always keep children well away when mixing slurry?
- do you keep track of where family members are playing or working and when they are expected back?
- do you make sure everyone washes their hands before eating and drinking?
- do you keep chemicals locked in a secure store when not in use?
- do you make sure that guards are in place to prevent access to dangerous parts of machinery?
- have you made sure all family members know what to do in an emergency?
- have you prepared a list of emergency contact telephone numbers?

If children are old enough, tell them about the dangers they should look out, where they are not allowed to go, and encourage them to be responsible.

You can find more information about child safety on farms on the [Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland website](#).

Farm Secure app

The Farm Secure app provides an interesting and engaging way for parents and children to learn about the many dangers on farms and how to stay safe all year round.

Children can download the app from the App store, where they can take a quiz on farm safety, compare their scores with others on the leaderboard, and watch a number of farm safety videos on issues such as slurry, machinery,

farm animals, and bugs and germs.

More useful links