



Report: Hepatitis B vaccine safe; delaying would lead to increased infections

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Delaying the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine would lead to increased infections with no benefit to the vaccine's safety or effectiveness, according to a [new independent analysis](#).

The Vaccine Integrity Project, based at the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP), released its findings today from more than 400 studies and reports. The review comes as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) is poised to vote on delaying the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine when it [meets Thursday](#).

"After extensive review, we did not discover safety or effectiveness data that support delaying the choice parents have to vaccinate their newborns against hepatitis B," CIDRAP Director Michael T. Osterholm, Ph.D., M.P.H., said in a press release. "Instead, it showed that a delay will needlessly endanger the health of America's children, putting more of them at risk of HBV infection. The evidence clearly indicates that ACIP members should vote no against a change to the current recommendation."

Hepatitis [B attacks the liver](#) and can lead to lifelong disease including liver failure, cancer and death.

Managing hepatitis B infection is complex, making primary prevention essential. Young children who contract the virus typically do so from an infected mother at birth. Nearly 18,000 infants were born to a birthing parent who tested positive for hepatitis B in pregnancy in 2021, according to the report.

About 90% of infants infected at birth develop chronic hepatitis B infection. Among those with chronic infection, 25% will die prematurely from the disease, according to the report.

While universal screening of pregnant people is helpful, it does not identify all infected mothers. Some are never tested; other cases of transmittable infection are missed due to errors or false negatives.

In addition to contracting the virus at birth, a child can become infected by family members in their home and exposures from others in close contact settings. Many infected people initially don't know they have the disease.

Since 1991, ACIP has recommended a birth dose of the hepatitis B vaccine. When given with hepatitis B immune globulin, the vaccine reduces transmission of the virus from a mother to her newborn by 83%-97%, according to the report. Annual hepatitis B infections among infants and children have dropped 99% from 16,000 to less than 20.

Evidence shows the vaccine is safe with reactions generally being mild to moderate and temporary. There were no increased risks in giving it at birth compared to giving one month or later.

In a [letter to the ACIP chair](#) last week, AAP President Susan J. Kressly, M.D., FAAP, said hepatitis B vaccine "has one of the most well-established safety records of any vaccine."

"Switching to a non-universal recommendation will result in many children contracting hepatitis B infection, with devastating results for their health," she wrote.

She cited a model by the Center for Disease Analysis Foundation found that delaying the birth dose would result in 99,000 preventable hepatitis B infections.

Dr. Kressly also noted the vaccine's later doses often are part of combination vaccines.

"This shift could have dramatic effects on the current vaccine supply chain and the ability to offer vaccine in outpatient settings," Dr. Kressly wrote.

The AAP continues to recommend giving newborns a dose of hepatitis B vaccine within 24 hours of birth with additional doses at 1-2 months and 6-18 months.

Resources

- [AAP immunization schedule](#)
- [AAP Red Book chapter on hepatitis B](#)
- [AAP Fact Checked articles on hepatitis B vaccine](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on why babies need the hepatitis B vaccine](#)