

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

EMPLOYEE FACT SHEET
HEPATITIS B VACCINATION – PROTECTION FOR YOU

HEPATITIS: Hepatitis B is a serious disease. It is estimated that 80,000 people, mostly young adults, get infected with HBV. More than 11,000 people have to stay in the hospital because of Hepatitis B and 4,000 – 5,000 people die from chronic Hepatitis B. Each year about 8,000 healthcare workers contract Hepatitis B and about 200 of those will die. In addition, some will become carriers, passing the disease on to others. Carriers also face a significantly higher risk of liver ailments which can be fatal, including cirrhosis of liver or primary liver cancer. About 1/3 of the people who are infected with Hepatitis B in the U.S. don't know how they got it. While there is no cure for Hepatitis B, a vaccine does exist that can prevent infection.

Hepatitis B is spread through contact with the blood and body fluids of an infected person. A person can get infected in several ways, such as:

- by having unprotected sex with an infected person
- by sharing needles when injecting illegal drugs
- by being stuck with a used needle on the job
- human bite by someone who has the Hepatitis B virus
- having infectious material (blood and body fluids of infected person) get into your existing cuts or abrasions
- during birth when the virus passes from an infected mother to her baby

The Hepatitis B virus (HBV) can cause short-term (acute) illness that leads to:

- loss of appetite
- tiredness
- pain in muscles, joints, and stomach
- diarrhea and vomiting
- jaundice – yellowing of skin and eyes

It can also cause long-term (chronic) illness that leads to:

- liver damage (cirrhosis)
- liver cancer
- death

About 1.25 million people in the U.S. have chronic HBV infection.

After exposure, it can take two to six months for Hepatitis B to develop. This is extremely important, since vaccinations begun immediately after exposure can often prevent infection. The best way to protect yourself is with the Hepatitis B vaccination series. Employers must provide engineering controls, and workers must use work practices and protective equipment to prevent

exposure to potentially infectious materials. However, the best defense against Hepatitis B is vaccination. You can receive your first dose today, the second dose in one month and the last dose five months after the second dose. The complete series takes six months. More than 90% of those vaccinated will develop immunity to the Hepatitis B virus. At this point it is unclear how long immunity lasts, so booster injections may be required in the future. The vaccine causes no harm to those who are already immune or to those who may be HBV carriers. Although some employees may opt to have their blood tested for antibodies to determine the need for vaccine, employers may not make such screening a condition of receiving vaccination nor are employers required to provide this screening.

Who Needs Vaccination?

It is a requirement that employers offer the three injection vaccination to all employees who are at risk of exposure to blood and other potentially infectious materials as part of their job duties. All jobs at SHCMHC are categorized by exposure risk. While all employees may have the free vaccination series, employees in risk categories 1 and 2 are strongly encouraged to complete the series. The vaccination must be offered within 10 days of initial assignment to a job where exposure can be “reasonably anticipated”.

What Does Vaccination Involve?

The Hepatitis B vaccine is a noninfectious yeast based vaccine given in three injections in the arm. It is prepared from recombinant yeast cultures, rather than human blood or plasma. Thus, there is no risk of developing Hepatitis B from the vaccine. A health care professional is available to answer any questions you may have.

What Are The Risks Of Getting Hepatitis B Vaccine?

A vaccine, like any other medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as allergic reactions. The risk of the vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small. Getting Hepatitis B vaccine is much safer than getting Hepatitis B disease. Most people do not have any problems. Mild symptoms of site soreness lasting a day or two occurred in some adults and mild to moderate fever (1 – 100 adults) has been reported. It is rare to have an allergic reaction.

Some People Should Not Get The Vaccine Or Should Wait

People should not get the Hepatitis B vaccine if they have ever had a life-threatening reaction to **baker’s yeast** (the kind used for making bread) or to a previous dose of Hepatitis B vaccine. People who are moderately or severely ill at the time the injection is scheduled should usually wait until they recover before getting the vaccine. Limited data indicates no evidence of risk for adverse events to developing fetus when Hepatitis B vaccine is administered to a pregnant

woman, but you should consult and obtain permission from your physician before taking this or any other medication during pregnancy.

What If I Decline?

Workers who decide to decline the vaccination must complete a declination form. Employers keep these forms on file so that they know the vaccination status of everyone who is exposed to blood. At any time after a worker initially declines to receive the vaccine, he or she may opt to take it.

What If I Am Exposed But Have Not Yet Been Vaccinated?

If a worker experiences an exposure incident, such as a needle stick or blood splash in the eye, he or she must receive confidential medical evaluation from a licensed health care professional and appropriate follow-up. To the extent possible, the employer is to determine the source individual for HBV as well as HIV infectivity. The worker's blood will also be screened if he or she agrees.

The health care professional is to follow the guidelines of the U.S. Public Health Service in providing treatment. This would include Hepatitis B vaccination. The health care professional must give a written opinion on whether or not vaccination is recommended and whether the employee received it. Only this information is reported to the employer. Employee medical records must remain confidential. HIB or HBV status must not be reported to the employer.

For more information, you may speak to the Center nurse, contact CDC (1-800-232-4636) at www.cdc.gov/nip, or www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.