



Australian Government

Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing

AUSTRALIAN TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON IMMUNISATION (ATAGI) STATEMENT

Issue date: 11 December 2025

THE IMPORTANCE AND SAFETY OF HEPATITIS B VACCINE AT BIRTH

- Immunisation of babies at birth is a safe and effective way to prevent transmission of hepatitis B virus from mother to infant, as well as transmission of hepatitis B virus from household contacts to the infant in the first few months of life.
- ATAGI recommends that infants receive four doses of hepatitis B vaccine, starting with one dose of monovalent hepatitis B vaccine at birth, and a further 3 doses of a hepatitis-B containing vaccine at 2, 4 and 6 months of age. Low birthweight and pre-term newborns are recommended to receive a fifth dose at 12 months of age to ensure adequate protection.
- ATAGI recommends a birth dose for all newborns, irrespective of a mother's hepatitis B status, because:
 - Screening for hepatitis B infection during pregnancy does not always occur.
 - There may be errors or a delay in reporting results to the pregnant person
 - The pregnant person may become infected after screening.¹
 - Transmission of hepatitis B infection from another household member to the baby may occur.
 - Babies infected at birth have about a 90% chance of developing chronic hepatitis B², a lifelong infection which can lead to liver failure and liver cancer later in life.
 - A birth dose provides an important safety net to protect newborns at birth and into childhood. Delaying this dose creates an unnecessary and avoidable risk of chronic hepatitis B infection.
- This early protection is a key part of Australia's National Immunisation Program, helping reduce hepatitis B among children and into adulthood.
- It is important that all children complete the full hepatitis B vaccine series, as household transmission remains a significant risk. Up to 50% of children who become infected in childhood have acquired hepatitis B infection from household contacts who don't know they are infected.³

¹ MacIntyre CR. Hepatitis B vaccine: risks and benefits of universal neonatal vaccination. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 2001;37:215-7.

² Edmunds WJ, Medley GF, Nokes DJ, Hall AJ, Whittle HC. The influence of age on the development of the hepatitis B carrier state. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences* 1993;253:197-201.

³ Armstrong GL, Mast EE, Wojczynski M, Margolis HS. Childhood hepatitis B virus infections in the United States before hepatitis B immunization. *Pediatrics*. 2001 Nov;108(5):1123-8.

- Since the nationwide introduction of the hepatitis B vaccine for newborns in 2000, there has been a 5-fold decrease in the number of newly-acquired hepatitis B infections diagnosed each year⁴, demonstrating the vaccine's effectiveness in protecting young Australians.
- Hepatitis B remains a significant cause of disease worldwide. In Australia almost 220,000 people were living with chronic hepatitis B in 2023.⁵ The World Health Organization estimates that 254 million people were living with chronic hepatitis B infection in 2022 globally, with 1.2 million new infections each year, and 1.2 million hepatitis B related deaths in 2022⁶.

Further details about hepatitis B vaccination, including effectiveness and safety, can be found in the [Australian Immunisation Handbook hepatitis B chapter](#).

The Australian Government's new *Fourth National Hepatitis B Strategy 2025–2030*, due for release in early 2026, will guide Australia's strategic response to achieve elimination of hepatitis B as a public health threat by 2030. The Strategy sets a 2030 childhood vaccination goal to ensure greater than 95% of newborns receive a timely hepatitis B vaccine dose at birth.

⁴ National Communicable Disease Surveillance Dashboard. [Dashboard · NINDSS Portal](#). Accessed 9/12/25.

⁵ Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney. 2024. HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia: Annual surveillance report 2024. [HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia Annual surveillance report 2024 : Hepatitis B](#). Accessed 9/12/25.

⁶ World Health Organization. Hepatitis B Fact Sheet. 23 July 2025. [Hepatitis B](#). Accessed 9/12/25.