Hepatitis B Virus Encyclopedia Article

Hepatitis B Virus

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Hepatitis B Virus

Virus, also known as serum hepatitis virus, that may lead to chronic infection of the liver in unvaccinated children.

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) causes serious illnesses, notably chronic infection of the liver or liver **cancer,** especially if the virus is acquired during childhood. The virus is transmitted in several ways, including from mother to infant at birth. During the first five years of life, children are susceptible to the virus, and can contract it from carriers of the virus with whom they come into close contact. The most common ways that HBV virus is spread in adults is through sexual intercourse or through shared intravenous drug needles or ear-piercing equipment.

Not everyone exposed to the virus contracts hepatitis; many people are carriers of the virus without even anoint it. Immunization for infants and young children is important because early infection with HBV greatly increases the likelihood that the virus will cause liver failure in adulthood. All mothers who are at risk of carrying HBV, such as health care workers, are tested for HBV at the time of giving birth. Babies whose mothers test positive for HBV must receive the first dose of vaccine at or immediately after birth. In addition, those babies receive a dose of hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG), and receive the other two recommended doses of the vaccine on an accelerated schedule. No serious adverse reactions are linked to the hepatitis B vaccine. The mild effects that may occur include fussiness, soreness, swelling, or redness at the site of the injection. These symptoms, when they occur, begin within 24 hours of receiving the vaccine and are gone with 48-72 hours.

For Further Study

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