AIDE-MEMOIRE for an effective approach to the immunization of health workers against hepatitis B

Are health workers at risk of exposure to hepatitis B virus (HBV)?
Yes: HBV is an important occupational hazard for health workers. Approximately 37% of hepatitis B infections among health workers worldwide are the result of occupational exposure.1 The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that health workers be vaccinated against HBV.2 The WHO Global Plan of Action on Workers’ Health calls upon member countries to develop and implement occupational policies and programs for health workers, including hepatitis B immunization.3

What is hepatitis B?
HBV is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease that can be life-threatening. Persons with chronic HBV infection have a 15 to 25% risk of dying prematurely from HBV-related cirrhosis and liver cancer.2 Worldwide, an estimated two billion people have been infected with HBV, and more than 350 million have chronic liver infections.4 Health workers can become infected with HBV by exposure to even small amounts of blood from needle-stick injuries or punctures with blood-contaminated equipment.

How can health workers be protected against HBV?
- Immunize
- Adhere to standard precautions
- Train health workers about mode of transmission and preventive measures
- Ensure access to post-exposure management services
- Record and report exposure to blood and body fluids

Be prepared: addressing commonly asked questions related to the hepatitis B vaccine

➢ What is the efficacy and safety of the hepatitis B vaccine?
The hepatitis B vaccine is 95% effective in preventing HBV infection and its chronic consequences. The hepatitis B vaccine has been used since 1982 and over one billion doses have been administered worldwide.2

➢ What are the benefits of being vaccinated against hepatitis B?
Hepatitis B vaccination protects and promotes the health of health workers, patients, and families. For employers, a vaccinated workforce contributes to the availability of a healthy workforce.

➢ What are the potential adverse effects of hepatitis B vaccine?
Potential acute effects include redness, swelling, and pain at the injection site. Serious effects are very rare; difficulty breathing, rash, and shock have been reported.5

Effective strategies to increase vaccination coverage

- Demonstrate management commitment towards the health of employees including providing resources needed to prevent exposure
- Provide and promote accessible and free on-site vaccination
- Establish participation in vaccination by signed consent or declination
- Educate health workers about the occupational risks associated with HBV, the efficacy of vaccination and other preventive measures
- Repeat reminders to ensure completion of all three doses of hepatitis B vaccine
- Integrate immunization into pre-employment orientation for employees and students
- Monitor immunization coverage regularly

Who should be immunized?
Any health worker who performs tasks involving direct patient contact or handles blood-contaminated items is at risk:
- Physicians, nurses, laboratory workers, dentists, pharmacists, aids, and allied health professionals
- Support staff, such as transporters, cleaners, and waste collectors
- Students training in the field of health care

Hepatitis B immunization
- Recommended schedule: 0, 1, and 6 months6
- Dose: 1mL intramuscular injection
- Serological testing:
  - Pre-vaccination: not indicated6,7
  - Post-vaccination: not required as part of a routine program2