



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



Regional Office of the
World Health Organization

Hepatitis B Immunization of Health Workers

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 adverse effects include redness, swelling, and pain at the injection site. Serious effects are very rare; difficulty breathing, rash, and shock have been reported.*⁵



Checklist

Ensuring a successful vaccination campaign targeting health workers

Action Plan for immunizing health workers

- Identify responsible authority (e.g., occupational health unit)
- Implement occupational health and immunization policy and guidelines
- Integrate immunization activities within existing health and safety plan
- Allocate human and financial resources

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 indicated^{6,7}
 - Post-vaccination: not required as part of a routine program²