

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease. It is a major global health problem, and the most serious type of viral hepatitis. It is estimated that about 780,000 people die each year due to consequences of hepatitis B, such as liver cirrhosis and liver cancer.

The virus is highly contagious and is transmitted through contact with the blood or other body fluids of an infected person. Hepatitis B virus can survive outside the body for at least 7 days, and is an important occupational hazard for health workers.

Hepatitis B is preventable with currently available safe and effective vaccines.

WHO recommends that all infants should receive their first dose of vaccine as soon as possible after birth, preferably within 24 hours. Delivery of hepatitis B vaccine within 24 hours of birth should be a performance indicator for all immunization programmes. The birth dose should be followed by 2 or 3 doses to complete the primary series.

There is no evidence to support the need for a booster dose of hepatitis B vaccine. Protection lasts at least 20 years, and is possibly life-long.

WHO strongly recommends that all regions and associated countries develop goals for hepatitis B control appropriate to their epidemiological situation.