

Renal Services

Hepatitis B Immunisation- Patient Information Leaflet

Hepatitis B Immunisation

Renal Association Guidelines recommend that patients who require renal replacement therapy (RRT) should be immunised against Hepatitis B (HBV). The introduction of HBV immunisation was associated with a reduction in the incidence of HBV infection in dialysis units. People at increased risk of contracting hepatitis B should be immunised. The hepatitis B vaccine is very effective at preventing infection with hepatitis B if you have been at risk from a possible source of infection (for example blood from dialysis lines) and you are not immunised. It is for this reason the Department of Health recommends that all patients with kidney failure be vaccinated against the virus. Ideally patients are vaccinated before they start dialysis.

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. The disease mainly affects the liver. However, if you are infected the virus is present in body fluids such as blood, saliva, semen and vaginal fluid. In the UK it is estimated that about 1 in 1000 people are infected with the hepatitis B virus. It is much more common in other countries - these include sub-Saharan Africa, most of Asia and the Pacific islands.

If you are infected with the hepatitis B virus, the initial symptoms can range from no symptoms at all to a severe illness. After this 'acute phase', in a number of cases the virus remains in the body long-term. These people are called 'carriers'. Some carriers do not have any symptoms but can still pass on the virus to other people. About 1 in 4 carriers eventually develop a serious liver disease such as chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis, and in some cases liver cancer develops after a number of years.



Patient Information

How is Hepatitis B passed on?

The hepatitis B virus is passed from person to person as a result of:

- Blood to blood contact.
- Having unprotected sex with an infected person.
- From an infected mother passing it to her baby.
- A human bite from an infected person.

The immunisation schedule

A course consisting of three or four routine injections (dependent on the vaccine brand used) will be administered into the upper part of your arm, over a number of months. You will be given the dates you will need to return for your injections. If you are already on dialysis, the injections will be performed at your dialysis unit on a dialysis day.

Two months following your course of injections you will need to have a blood test. This checks if you have made antibodies against the hepatitis B virus and are immune. This is because for some people, a booster is needed. If you have been referred to the transplant team you may be given a further course of an alternative type of Hepatitis B vaccine. Following the booster or alternative course of immunisation, if your antibody level remains 0 you are known as a non-responder and no further immunisations will be given. Otherwise blood tests will be taken annually to monitor levels and boosters may be required to maintain antibody levels. We aim to achieve levels above 100. If levels are between 10-100 boosters will be administered and levels below 10 non-responders.

Does the vaccine have any side effects?

As with any vaccine or drug, there will be some people who have a reaction or suffer side effects. However this is rare. The most common are tenderness, redness, pain or swelling at the site of the injection or mild fever. These will only last a few days at the most. If you are concerned please contact your GP or renal team at UHCW.

General Advice and Consent

If a Kidney Transplant is received during the period of your Hepatitis B immunisation programme please do not have the vaccination. The initial 3-6 months are a period of intense immunosuppression after kidney transplantation; it is preferable to avoid vaccinations at this time.

Most of your questions may have been answered by this leaflet however; this is only the starting point for discussion with your healthcare team.

Patient Information

Before any doctor, nurse or therapist examines you they must seek your consent or permission. In order to make a decision you will need to have the information from health professionals about the treatment or investigation which is being offered to you. You should ask them more questions if you require further information.

The information you receive should be about your condition, the alternatives available to you, and whether it carries risks as well as benefits.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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