



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Take a Shot at Hep B

Reporting of Perinatal Hepatitis B Virus Infection — United States, 2005

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Hepatitis B is a highly infectious disease that can lead to a lifetime of health problems. While most cases in adults don't develop into chronic disease, infants with hepatitis B have a 90 percent chance of having life-long health issues and a 25 percent risk for premature death.

Dr. Susan Wang is a physician with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. She's joining us by phone today to discuss the importance of getting vaccinated for hepatitis B. Welcome to the show, Susan.

[Dr. Wang] Thanks very much, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Susan, how common is hepatitis B in the U.S.?

[Dr. Wang] Well, approximately 1.2 million Americans have chronic hepatitis B, and each year in the United States, about 24,000 women who have hepatitis B infection give birth.

[Dr. Gaynes] How do infants get infected with hepatitis B?

[Dr. Wang] The hepatitis B virus can easily be passed from an infected mother to her infant during birth, but fortunately, we have a very effective vaccine – the hepatitis B vaccine –which, when given to the infant right after birth, will prevent the infection from being transmitted.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are symptoms of hepatitis B?

[Dr. Wang] People who become infected with hepatitis B as adults can have jaundice, that is yellowing of the eyes and the skin. They can also have abdominal pain, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, and vomiting. However, some adults and most children do not have any symptoms at all when they become infected with hepatitis B. So it is possible for a person to have the infection and not even know it, and this is one of the reasons that pregnant women are actually routinely tested for hepatitis B.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is there a cure for hepatitis B?

[Dr. Wang] If adults get infected with the virus, most adults will be able to get rid of the infection. Their immune systems will fight it off and clear the virus. Unfortunately, the infants who get infected are rarely able to clear the virus and they usually remain infected for the rest of

their lives. So, for people whose immune systems cannot clear the virus when they first get infected, there is no cure for hepatitis B. But there are certain treatments which can delay or even reverse some of the effects of liver damage due to the virus.

[Dr. Gaynes] Susan, if a pregnant woman has hepatitis B, will her newborn also have it?

[Dr. Wang] Her newborn is at high risk of getting infected, but because we have an incredibly effective hepatitis B vaccine, if the infant is vaccinated right after the baby is born, that transmission of the virus from the mother to the infant can be prevented.

[Dr. Gaynes] When and how often should infants be vaccinated against hepatitis B?

[Dr. Wang] CDC recommends that all babies should get the first dose of vaccine before they leave the hospital, and any infants who are born to an infected woman should get the vaccine right after delivery. During their first year of life, the infant then needs to complete the hepatitis B vaccine series. So, in total, they will need to receive about three or four doses of the vaccine, depending on the recommendation of the pediatrician.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about hepatitis B?

[Dr. Wang] For more information, listeners should go to www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Susan. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Susan Wang about the importance of being vaccinated against hepatitis B.

Remember, every infant should receive the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine before discharge from the hospital. Those born to infected mothers should be vaccinated within hours of being born.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.