

## Information for pregnant women who are hepatitis-B positive

This leaflet is for pregnant women who are hepatitis-B positive. This means you carry the hepatitis-B virus.

This leaflet tells you about:

- being hepatitis-B positive; and
- vaccinations which can stop your baby from catching the virus from you after they are born.

### What does my blood test result mean?

Your blood test result means that you have caught the hepatitis-B virus at some time in your life. It is unlikely that your baby will catch the virus while you are pregnant, **but there is a high chance that you could pass the virus to your baby during the birth.**

### What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus which attacks the liver. Many people who carry hepatitis B have no symptoms and may not know they have the virus until they have a screening test.

Some people who catch this virus never get rid of it from their body. The virus stays in their body even though they seem well. If this happens to you, you are a 'hepatitis-B carrier'. Even though you are healthy, you can still pass the virus to other people.

You can only pass the virus to another person if:

- your blood comes into contact with theirs;
- you have sex; or
- you pass it to your baby when you give birth.

You cannot pass the virus to other people during normal social contact, for example, going shopping, being with friends and family, and eating meals together.

In some parts of the world hepatitis B is very common and many people catch it at birth from their own mother. Because of this, those countries offer a hepatitis-B vaccination to all babies, but in the UK we only offer the vaccination to babies whose mothers are hepatitis-B positive.

### What treatment can I have?

You will be offered an appointment with a specialist who can test for liver damage and may recommend treatment.

## **Will my baby catch the virus?**

As you have hepatitis B, it is very likely that you will pass the virus to your baby during the birth. There is a 9 out of 10 chance (90%) that your baby will catch the virus and will carry hepatitis B for life. If your baby did not receive treatment, there would be a high chance of them developing severe problems like liver damage in later life.

## **What treatment can my baby have?**

We will ask you to give your permission for a safe and effective vaccine to be given to your baby which can protect him or her from carrying the virus and developing liver problems.

## **Your baby will need four vaccinations before they are one year old to get the best protection against hepatitis B.**

The first vaccination should be given within 48 hours of the birth. If your blood test result shows that the hepatitis-B virus you have is highly infectious, then your baby will also be offered another injection at the same time to give extra protection against the virus.

Your baby will need three more vaccinations. These are given when your baby is:

- one month old;
- two months old; and
- 12 months old.

## **It is very important that your baby receives the full course of the vaccinations, or they will not get the best possible protection.**

You should be invited to bring your baby in for these vaccinations. If this does not happen, you should ask your doctor or health visitor about the vaccinations your baby needs.

After your baby has completed the course of vaccinations the doctor will ask for the baby to have a blood test. This is to make sure that the injections were successful and your baby is free from the infection.

## **How can I stay healthy with hepatitis B?**

The following simple things can help you stay healthy:

- Do not drink alcohol – it can damage the liver.
- Tell your doctor that you are a hepatitis B carrier and ask about any treatment or tests that might help.
- Ask a doctor before you take any medicine, even herbal medicines or medicines that can be bought without a prescription (for example, aspirin).
- Never inject drugs. This can give you two other types of hepatitis infection (hepatitis C and D) which also damage the liver. Get help from a drug-treatment centre if you need to get off drugs.

## **Confidentiality**

To give you and your baby the best care, we will need to involve other specialists. Your midwife will ask you if they can share information about you with these specialists before the specialists become involved with your care.

## **Where can I get more information?**

You can get more information about hepatitis B and antenatal tests from the hospital midwife who specialises in antenatal screening or the hospital doctor (the obstetrician).

## **You can also contact the British Liver Trust at:**

2 Southampton Road  
Ringwood  
BH24 1HY  
Phone: 0870 770 8028  
Website: [www.britishlivertrust.org.uk](http://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk)



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[www.antenatalscreening.org](http://www.antenatalscreening.org)

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