

**H**epatitis B is an illness produced by a virus (HBV) that affects the liver. When an adult contracts this virus, the infection can develop in two ways:

- in the majority of cases, the organism will eliminate the virus and the adult will get better with no kind of consequences (this happens in the case of acute hepatitis B).
- in some cases, the organism does not manage to deal with the virus and chronic hepatitis B develops, which often occurs with no clinical symptoms, but can produce serious lesions in the liver. In these cases, the infected person becomes a lifelong carrier of the illness and can transmit the disease to other people.

The main ways that hepatitis B can be transmitted are:

- contact with blood, by means of needles or pointed objects.
- contact with body fluids, through sexual relations
- from mother to baby, during birth.

For this reason it is important for all pregnant women to be tested systematically for hepatitis B in order to prevent the transmission of the infection to the new-born baby.

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**Are you expecting a baby?**

**Pregnancy and hepatitis B**

 Generalitat de Catalunya  
**Departament de Salut**

## Why is hepatitis B so serious for pregnant women?

A pregnant woman who is infected by the hepatitis B virus (HBV) can transmit the infection to her child during birth. Infected new-born babies are likely to develop the chronic illness, with subsequent liver complications. This is why it is so important to have a blood test during pregnancy in order to detect the infection and to take the necessary measures to protect the baby.

## Does being infected with hepatitis B affect pregnancy?

During pregnancy, the placenta acts as a protective barrier that prevents the virus from passing to the baby. It is during birth, when the baby is in direct contact with the mother's blood for the first time, that the infection can be transmitted.



## What happens when the HBV test is positive?

If the test confirms the presence of HBV and, therefore, that the pregnant woman is infected, it is essential to protect the new-born baby as soon as it is born.

## How is it possible to protect the baby of a woman infected with HBV?

Just after the baby is born, in the delivery room or during the first 12 hours of life, two injections should be administered:

- A first dose of the hepatitis B vaccine.
- A dose of immune globulin against hepatitis B (HBIG).

For the treatment to be effective, it is essential to complete the vaccination with the second and third doses of the vaccine against hepatitis B, in the second and sixth months of the baby's life.

## Is it possible to breastfeed your baby if you are infected with hepatitis B?

Yes, because the benefits of the mother's milk are greater than the risk of infection, which is minimal, if we take into account that the baby has already been protected at birth with the vaccination against hepatitis and with the HBIG. However, it is important to make sure that there are no lesions in the nipples that may bleed.

## Once the protective measures have been carried out for the baby, what else must we do?

It is necessary for women infected with hepatitis B to be assessed and seen regularly by a doctor so that the illness can be monitored and, if necessary, for the people she is living with to be protected by means of vaccination.

**REMEMBER:**  
All pregnant women should have a hepatitis B test.

- If the test is positive, the mother and the health personnel must ensure that the baby receives the gamma globulin and the vaccine against hepatitis B during the first hours of life and, subsequently, must complete the vaccination at two and six months of age.
- Infection with HBV can be avoided by administering any of the vaccines against hepatitis B.