

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Hepatitis B 101

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) encourages residents to know if their hepatitis B shots are up to date. Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. The virus, which is called hepatitis B virus (HBV), can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death.

Hepatitis B is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluid infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is not infected or has not had the vaccine. People can become infected with this virus in many ways, such as:

- Sharing items such as toothbrushes, razors, or medical equipment (like a glucose monitor) with a person who has hepatitis B.
- Exposure to the blood from a person who has hepatitis B through needlesticks or other sharp instruments.
- Direct contact with the blood or open sores of a person who has hepatitis B.
- Birth (spread from a mother who has hepatitis B to her baby during birth).
- Sex with a partner who has hepatitis B.
- Sharing needles, syringes, or drug preparation equipment.

Worldwide, chronic hepatitis B and C cause 80% of all liver cancer, which is the second most common cause of cancer death. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hepatitis B vaccine was first licensed in the United States in 1981 and became widely recommended in 1982. CDC data shows that since that time hepatitis B infections in the US have dropped by 90%.

Being up to date on your hepatitis B vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis B. Children get a hepatitis B vaccine as part of their regular childhood immunizations, with the first dose normally given at birth to protect newborn infants who are at higher risk of long-term problems from this disease. Children, adolescents, and adults to age 50 who have not gotten any hepatitis B vaccines should complete a 3-dose series. If you started but did not finish your series, you do not have to restart if you would like to get up to date on your shots.

If you are unsure about whether you or your child are up to date on your vaccines, talk to your healthcare provider or contact a public health nurse at SWNPHD. You can also look up your shot records in the Nebraska State Immunization Information System (NESIIS) at nesiis-dhhs-prod.ne.gov.

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow us on Facebook and Instagram or view the website at www.swhealth.ne.gov. Call (308) 345-4223, one number three locations, McCook, Imperial, and Ogallala.

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