

OSHA Requirements for Hepatitis B Vaccination

WHAT IS THE HEPATITIS B VIRUS AND ITS VACCINATION?

The Hepatitis B virus (HBV) is a pathogenic microorganism that can cause potentially life-threatening diseases in humans, specifically in the form of liver ailments like cirrhosis of the liver and primary liver cancer. The virus is transmitted through exposure to blood and other potentially infectious materials (OPIM).

The Hepatitis B vaccination is recognized as an effective defense against HBV infection and is encouraged by OSHA, the CDC, and other organizations to those who are at risk of contracting the virus.

The Hepatitis B vaccination is a non-infectious vaccine prepared from recombinant yeast cultures, rather than from human blood or plasma. There is no risk of contamination from other bloodborne pathogens, nor is there any chance of developing HBV from the vaccine. The vaccine causes no harm to those who are already immune or to those who may be HBV carriers. Individuals are encouraged to complete the entire Hepatitis B vaccination series to ensure immunity from the virus.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Any workers who have reasonably anticipated contact with blood or OPIM during performance of their jobs are considered to have occupational exposure and to be at risk of being infected by the virus.

Examples of workers who may have occupational exposure include, but are not limited to:

Healthcare workers, emergency responders, morticians, first-aid personnel, correctional officers and laundry workers in hospitals and commercial laundries that service healthcare or public safety institutions

EMPLOYER REQUIREMENTS

Employers are required to offer the Hepatitis B vaccination series, free of charge, to all workers with occupational exposure.

In addition, employers must develop an exposure control plan and implement use of universal precautions and control measures to protect all workers with occupational exposure. These measures might include engineering controls, work practice controls, and personal protective equipment.

Employers must also ensure that all occupationally exposed workers are trained about the vaccine and vaccination, including efficacy, safety, method of administration, and the benefits of vaccination. This training includes but is not limited to:

- Informing that the vaccine and vaccination are offered at no cost to the worker.
- The vaccination must be offered after the worker is trained and within 10 days of initial assignment to a job where there is occupational exposure
 - The employer is exempt from this if the worker has previously received the vaccine series, antibody testing has revealed that the worker is immune, or the vaccine is contraindicated for medical reasons. If the employee does not receive the vaccination series for one of these reasons, there must still be documentation to prove that the employer offered the employee the vaccination series.
- The employer must obtain a written opinion from the licensed healthcare professional within 15 days of the completion of the evaluation for vaccination specifying whether hepatitis B vaccination is indicated for the worker and if the worker has received the vaccination.

Some workers may desire to receive blood testing for antibodies to see if vaccination is needed. Employers are barred from making such screening a condition of receiving vaccination. Employers are *not* required to provide prescreening.

DECLINING THE VACCINATION

Workers are allowed to decline the vaccination. Should this occur, they are required to sign a declination form stating their intent to do so.

If a worker initially declines to receive the vaccine, but at a later date decides to accept it, the employer is required to make it available, at no cost, provided the worker is still occupationally exposed.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

It is recommended for providers to visit OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens and Needlestick Prevention Safety and Health Topics for more detailed information and requirements.

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/bloodbornepathogens/standards.html>