

Bellevue College

HEALTH CARE PROGRAMS INFORMATION ABOUT HEPATITIS B VACCINE

The Disease: Hepatitis B is a viral infection caused by hepatitis B virus (HBV) which causes death in 1-2% of patients. Most people with hepatitis B recover completely, but approximately 5-10% become chronic carriers of the virus. Most of these people have no symptoms, but can continue to transmit the disease to others. Some may develop chronic active hepatitis and cirrhosis. HBV also appears to be a causative factor in the development of liver cancer.

The Vaccine: Hepatitis B vaccine is produced from the plasma of chronic HBV carriers. The vaccine consists of high purified, formalin-inactivated hepatitis B antigen (viral coating material). It has been extensively tested for safety in chimpanzees and for safety and efficacy in large scale clinical trials with human subjects. A high percentage of healthy people who receive two doses of vaccine and a booster achieve high levels of surface antibody (anti-HBs) and protection against hepatitis B. Persons with immune-system abnormalities, such as dialysis patients, have less response to the vaccine; but over half of those receiving it do develop antibodies. Full immunization requires three doses of vaccine over a six-month period, although some persons may not develop immunity even after three doses. There is no evidence that the vaccine has ever caused hepatitis B. However, persons who have been infected with HBV prior to receiving the vaccine may go on to develop clinical hepatitis in spite of immunization. The duration of immunity is unknown at this time.

Possible Vaccine Side Effects: The incidence of side effects is very low. NO serious side effects have been reported with the vaccine. A few persons experience tenderness and redness at the site of the injection. Low grade fever may occur. Rash, nausea, joint pain and mild fatigue have also been reported. The possibility exists that more serious side effects may be identified with more extensive use.

If you have any questions about hepatitis or the hepatitis B vaccine, please ask.