“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Toxins, certain drugs, some diseases, heavy alcohol use, and bacterial and viral infections can all cause hepatitis. Hepatitis is also the name of a family of viral infections that affect the liver; the most common types are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. All three diseases are caused by different viruses and have different modes of transmission which affect the liver differently. Hepatitis A occurs as an acute infection and does not become chronic. If treated, most individuals improve. Hepatitis B and C can also begin as acute infections, but in some people the virus remains in the body, resulting in chronic disease and long-term problems.

**Hepatitis B** is a contagious liver disease that ranges in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness. Hepatitis B is spread when blood, or serum derived fluids, such as, semen, vaginal secretions or saliva infected with the B virus enters the body of a person who is not infected through contact with mucous membranes or unapparent breaks in the skin (abrasions, dermatitis or cuts). Individuals can become infected during activities such as:

- Exposure to blood from needle sticks or other sharp instruments
- Direct contact with the blood or other potentially infected materials
- Sex with an infected partner
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- Sharing items such as razors or toothbrushes from an infected person
- During Birth (spread from an infected mother to her baby during birth)

Hepatitis B infection is the major infectious occupational hazard to healthcare workers, causing approximately 12,000 infections, 3,000 cases of acute clinical illness, 600 hospitalizations, 1,000 chronic carriers, and 200 deaths annually. The virus can survive outside the body at least 7 days, during which time it can still cause infection if it enters the body of a person who is not infected. Without pre-prophylaxis, 6-30% of non-immune healthcare workers who sustain an exposure from an infectious source develop Hepatitis B Infection. Signs and symptoms of Hepatitis B virus include: anorexia, abdominal discomfort, nausea and vomiting, arthralgia, rash, low grade fever, and jaundice. There is no medication available to treat acute Hepatitis B. During this short-term infection, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition and fluids. The best treatment for Hepatitis B is through prevention.

**Hepatitis B Vaccine**

Hepatitis B vaccine can prevent the disease and the serious consequences of HBV infection, including liver cancer and cirrhosis. The vaccine is given as an intramuscular injection, in a series of three doses over a six month period. After the vaccine is given, the body makes antibodies that protect a person against the virus. These antibodies are then stored in the body and will fight off the infection if a person is exposed in the future. The vaccine induces protective antibody levels in 85-97% of healthy adults completing the series.

**Hepatitis B Information Sheet**

The Hepatitis B vaccine is safe. Soreness at the injection site is the most common side effect reported. As with any medicine, there are very small risks that a serious problem could occur after getting the vaccine. However, the potential risks associated with Hepatitis B are much greater than the risks the vaccine poses. Since the vaccine became available in 1982, more than 100 million people have received Hepatitis B vaccine in the United States with no serious side effects. Possible side effects include:
Common Side Effects
- Soreness, swelling at site
- Fever
- Headache, dizziness
- Fatigue

Uncommon Side Effects
- Pain, itching, bruising at site
- Sweating, tingling, flushing
- Low blood pressure
- Respiratory Flu-like symptoms
- Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, constipation, diarrhea
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Muscle aches and pains
- Sleep disturbances

Rare Side Effects
- Allergy, anaphylactic shock
- Arthritis
- Heart palpitations
- Asthma-like reactions
- Numbness, muscle paralysis
- Visual disturbances

As with any medication reaction, if side effects should occur, especially allergic reactions, you should immediately notify your physician.

Hepatitis B Vaccine Deferrals

The following individuals should refrain from receiving the Hepatitis B vaccine:
- Anyone with a life-threatening allergy to baker's yeast, or to any other component of the vaccine,
- Anyone who has had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a previous dose of Hepatitis B vaccine,
- Anyone who is moderately or severely ill when a dose of vaccine is scheduled should wait until they fully recover from their illness,
- Anyone known to be immune to Hepatitis B
- Anyone with a history of immunosuppressive disorders or receiving immunosuppressive drugs should consult with their physician first, and
- Any woman that is pregnant or lactating must have a written consent from their physician.