

This fact sheet explains the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's (Task Force) draft recommendation statement on screening for hepatitis B virus in pregnant women. It also tells you how you can send comments about the draft recommendation to the Task Force. Comments may be submitted from January 8, 2019 to January 29, 2019. The Task Force welcomes your comments.

Screening for Hepatitis B Virus in Pregnant Women

The Task Force issued a **draft recommendation statement** on *Screening for Hepatitis B Virus Infection in Pregnant Women*.

The Task Force recommends screening for hepatitis B infection in all pregnant women at their first prenatal visit to prevent passing the infection to newborns.

What is hepatitis B virus infection?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B infection causes damage to the liver which can range from mild, short-term illness to a serious, lifelong issue, such as liver disease or liver cancer.

Facts about Hepatitis B Virus

Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). It can be spread through blood, sharing needles, sexual contact, or to a baby during birth. It is estimated that there are 1.2 million people in the United States infected with hepatitis B.

There are two types of hepatitis B infection. The first type is acute hepatitis B. Acute hepatitis B is a short-term infection which occurs within the first six months after someone is exposed to HBV. There is no medication available to treat acute hepatitis B, but with rest, good nutrition, and fluids, some people, especially adults, can clear the virus out of their system. Some people will need to be hospitalized. People who clear the virus out of their system become immune and cannot get infected with the hepatitis B virus again.

The second type of hepatitis B infection is called chronic hepatitis B. Chronic hepatitis B is a long-lasting infection with the hepatitis B virus. Over time, chronic hepatitis B can cause serious health problems like liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death.

The younger a person is when they are infected with the hepatitis B virus, the greater chance they have of developing a chronic infection. Babies who become infected with HBV during childbirth have a 90 percent chance of developing chronic hepatitis B. Therefore, it is important to prevent babies from getting hepatitis B. One way to do that is to have pregnant women get screened for the hepatitis B virus during their first prenatal visit.

Facts about Screening for Hepatitis B Virus in Pregnant Women

Screening for hepatitis B is done through a blood test that looks for a specific protein in the blood. This screening has been the standard of care for more than 30 years. Pregnant women who test positive should be referred to appropriate medical care and counseling.

Potential Benefits and Harms of Screening for Hepatitis B Virus in Pregnant Women

The Task Force looked at evidence on the potential benefits and harms of screening for hepatitis B infection in pregnant women.

The Task Force found strong evidence that screening for hepatitis B has many benefits. Screening identifies hepatitis B in people who may not have otherwise known they are infected. When pregnant women are screened, and hepatitis B infection is caught early, they can get appropriate care throughout their pregnancy. It is also important for pregnant women to know if they have hepatitis B so that they can prevent giving it to their babies. To prevent babies from getting hepatitis B when their moms are infected, babies should receive both the hepatitis B vaccine and a preventive medication within 12 hours of birth.

The Task Force found no harms of screening for HBV infection in pregnant women.

The Draft Recommendation on Screening for Hepatitis B Virus in Pregnant Women: What Does It Mean?

Here is the Task Force's draft recommendation on screening for HBV in pregnant women. It is based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of screening for this purpose. It is also based on the size of the potential benefits and harms. Task Force recommendation grade is explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When the Task Force issues a **Grade A**, it recommends screening because it has more potential benefits than harms.

Before you send comments to the Task Force, you may want to read the [draft recommendation statement](#). The recommendation statement explains the evidence the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grade. An [evidence document](#) provides more detail about the scientific studies the Task Force reviewed.

Notes

1 The USPSTF recommends *screening* for hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in pregnant women at their first *prenatal visit*.
(A Recommendation)

1 *screening*
A blood test to see whether a person is infected with hepatitis B.

prenatal visit
Medical exams that a woman goes to throughout pregnancy. It is important that hepatitis B screening happen early, at the first prenatal visit.





What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services, such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a **draft recommendation statement**. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the final recommendation statement. To learn more, visit the [Task Force Web site](#).

USPSTF Recommendation Grades	
Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.

Click Here to Learn More about Hepatitis B Virus

-  **Pregnancy and Hepatitis B**
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
-  **Hepatitis B Questions and Answers for the Public**
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
-  **Hepatitis B Basics**
(Health and Human Services)
-  **What is Hepatitis B?**
(National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)

Click Here to Comment on the Draft Recommendation



The Task Force welcomes comments on this draft recommendation.



Comments must be received between January 8, 2019 and January 29, 2019.



All comments will be considered for use in writing final recommendations.