Hepatitis B Immune Globulin Information Sheet

What is hepatitis B disease?
Hepatitis B is a serious infection that affects the liver. It is caused by the hepatitis B virus. In some parts of the world hepatitis B disease is very common.

People who get hepatitis B disease can have a mild illness that lasts a few weeks, or can have more severe disease leading to death; others can have a serious lifelong illness. The risk of developing lifelong illness (chronic infection) is greater the younger the person is when they are infected with the hepatitis B virus. Chronic hepatitis B infection can cause permanent liver damage and scarring, or liver cancer later in life.

How is hepatitis B infection spread?
Hepatitis B virus is found in blood and body fluids (e.g., semen and vaginal fluid) of an infected person. The hepatitis B virus can be spread through sexual contact with an infected person; through sharing contaminated needles and equipment used for tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture or injecting drugs; through sharing personal care items such as razors, scissors, nail clippers or toothbrushes; through bites, needle stick injuries and sexual assault from blood and body fluids of an infected person or to an infant at birth from an infected mother.

People with chronic hepatitis B infection can spread the hepatitis B virus to other people even though they do not feel sick.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B infection?
Symptoms of hepatitis B infection include:
- Tiredness, joint pain and loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Pain in the stomach area
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- Dark urine and pale stool

About half of people infected with hepatitis B infection will not have any symptoms.

How can hepatitis B be prevented?
Hepatitis B immune globulin and hepatitis B vaccine are effective in preventing hepatitis B infection. Other ways to prevent hepatitis B infection include avoiding high risk activities such as: having unprotected sex; sharing equipment used for tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture and or injecting drugs; sharing personal care items such as razors, scissors, nail clippers or toothbrushes.

What is hepatitis B immune globulin?
Hepatitis B Immune Globulin (HBIG) is a sterilized blood product prepared from human blood plasma which contains concentrated amounts of hepatitis B antibodies. Antibodies are substances created in the blood to fight infections. HBIG is given to a person that may have been exposed to hepatitis B virus to help them fight off hepatitis B infection. The person will have immediate protection, but this lasts only a short time. Hepatitis B vaccine should also be given with the HBIG. When a person receives a vaccine, the body will develop its own antibodies - a process which takes time. Several doses of vaccine are required for long-lasting protection.

Is hepatitis B immune globulin safe?
Hepatitis B immune globulin is among the safest blood products available. Canadian Blood Services carefully screens donors and tests all blood plasma collected. In addition, the product is treated with heat and chemical processes to eliminate any other germs in case they are missed during the screening process. HBIG does not contain any preservatives.
Who should get hepatitis B immune globulin?
Hepatitis B immune globulin is used to prevent or reduce the severity of hepatitis B disease. The following groups may receive HBlg:

- infants born to hepatitis B infected mothers
- infants whose primary caregiver is infected with hepatitis B
- people who are exposed to blood or body fluid from a person who may be infected with hepatitis B (e.g., from open cuts, sores or bites from an infected person, needle stick injury)
- people who are sexual partners of someone who is infected with hepatitis B
- sexual assault victims

Who should not have hepatitis B immune globulin?
Hepatitis B immune globulin should not be given to people who have:

- a history of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) or other severe reaction to an immune globulin or any of its components
- any disorder that would contraindicate intramuscular injection (i.e., severe thrombocytopenia)
- an isolated IgA deficiency

People who have received a live vaccine (e.g., measles, mumps, rubella or varicella containing vaccine) in the 14 days before receiving HBBlg, may need to have the vaccine repeated. Those who receive HBBlg should postpone receiving live vaccines for at least 3 months.

What are the possible side effects to hepatitis B immune globulin?
Most people have no reactions to the product. Reactions that do occur are typically mild. Possible reactions include:

- local pain or tenderness at the injection site
- headache, tiredness and fever
- itchiness or hives may rarely occur

As with any injection, unexpected or unusual side effects can occur. This includes severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

What should you do if you have a reaction to hepatitis B immune globulin?

- Apply a cool moist cloth where the needle was given to reduce the pain and swelling
- Take a medication such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) to reduce the pain.
  - Aspirin® (ASA) is not recommended for individuals under 19 years of age
- Report any unusual reactions to Health Link Alberta

For health advice and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call Health Link Alberta at:

- 403-943-5465 in Calgary
- 780-408-5465 in Edmonton
- Toll free 1-866-408-5465 elsewhere in Alberta

Or visit www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca for health information online.

This material is designed for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have specific questions please consult your doctor or appropriate healthcare professional.