

Hepatitis B Birth Dose

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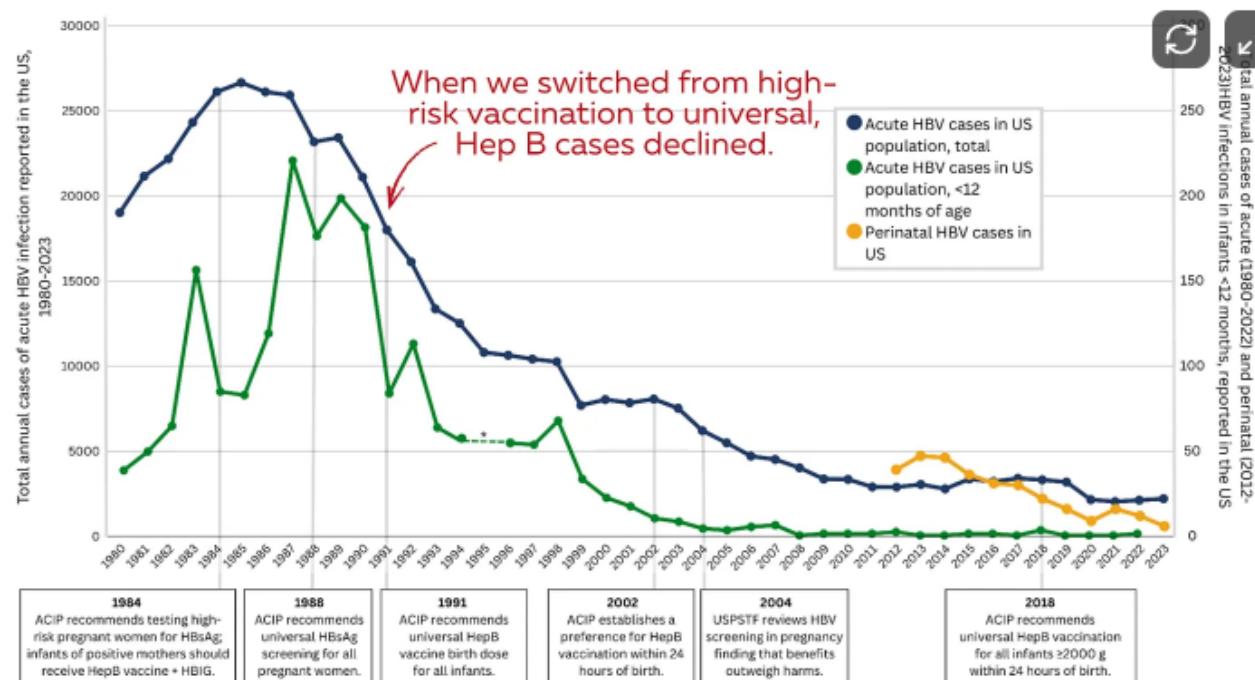
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Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted to downgrade its longstanding recommendation to vaccinate all newborns against hepatitis B at birth. The newly formed ACIP has, under the leadership of HHS Secretary RFK, Jr., become decidedly anti-vaccine. ACIP now emphasizes routine hepatitis B screening of pregnant women so that children born to uninfected mothers may have their birth dose deferred. Unfortunately, some women become infected with HBV after their first trimester screening, and some are never screened at all, due to late (or no) prenatal care or to medical error. The Delaware Academy of Medicine and Public Health strongly opposes these decisions by ACIP, which were not based on any new data or evidence.

Prior to 1991, about 30,000 children under 10 years old in the U.S. were chronically infected with hepatitis B virus. About half of these children got the virus from their infected mother, but the other half were infected during early childhood due to relatively casual contact from others in their environment. Over time, chronic infection leads to liver disease, cirrhosis, and risk for hepatocellular carcinoma. In 1991, the recommendation for universal hepatitis B immunization of infants, including a birth dose, was implemented. This has been a resounding public health success story with a 99% reduction in childhood HBV infection in the U.S. (figure 1).

Figure 1. Timeline of HBV Infection in the USA (Figure by CIDRAP,¹ Annotated by Your Local Epidemiologist)



The American Academy of Pediatrics continues to recommend the full series of hepatitis B vaccines, including the birth dose, for all infants, based on the science and the proven success of this strategy. Other professional societies are on board with this recommendation, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Physicians, the American Association of Family Physicians, and the Infectious Diseases Society of America.²

The Academy encourages clinicians to continue to advocate for the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine for their patients.

References

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