

# Universal birth dose policy saves lives



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*Adapted from the Immunization Action Coalition's on-line newsletter, IAC Express (Issue 277 Oct 16, 2001)*

On October 16, 2001, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted to recommend giving the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine to all newborns prior to discharge. The ACIP recommendation will now agree with American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) policy, which since 1992 has been to recommend a birth dose for all infants and to refer to an alternative schedule beginning with a dose at two months as acceptable.

The Michigan Department of Community Health and the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) support these recommendations and urge health professionals and hospitals to protect all infants from hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection by administering the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine to every infant before hospital discharge.

Approximately 19,000 women with chronic hepatitis B infection give birth in the U.S. each year. Ninety percent of perinatal infections can be prevented by postexposure prophylaxis given within 12 hours of birth. Tragically, many babies are exposed to HBV at birth but do not receive appropriate postexposure prophylaxis.

Because thimerosal has been removed from all pediatric hepatitis B vaccines in the U.S., concerns about thimerosal should no longer be an obstacle for practitioners in implementing a universal birth dose policy.

## **Why is such a policy necessary?**

Following are some of the reasons infants do not receive appropriate prophylaxis at birth and could become infected:

- A pregnant woman is hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) positive but her status is not communicated to the newborn nursery, is misinterpreted, or is mistranscribed in her prenatal records.
- A chronically-infected pregnant woman is not tested for HBsAg but, by mistake, is tested for the hepatitis B surface antibody (anti-HBs, which is also known as HBsAb).
- A pregnant woman is not tested for HBsAg either prenatally or in the hospital at the time of delivery.
- A high-risk woman is tested in early pregnancy and is HBsAg negative. She develops HBV infection later in pregnancy but it is not detected.
- A mother is HBsAg negative but the infant is exposed to HBV infection postnatally from another family member or caregiver. This occurs in two-thirds of the cases of childhood transmission.

In 1999, a baby in Michigan died due to not receiving prophylaxis at birth. A universal birth dose policy is necessary because it saves lives.

## **What is the answer?**

Vaccinate every baby in the hospital prior to discharge regardless of the HBsAg status of the mother.

Your support for providing a birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine to all infants while still in the hospital will protect and save lives that are now being put at risk. Currently 83 of 102 birthing hospitals in Michigan have implemented or reinstated policies that require physicians to offer all

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## *Continued from page 6*

newborns the hepatitis B vaccine prior to discharge. We would like to recognize these hospitals for their efforts to help prevent perinatal hepatitis B infection by offering hepatitis B vaccine to all newborns before hospital discharge:

- Allegan General Hospital
- Battle Creek Health Systems
- Bay Medical Center
- Beaumont Hospital/Troy
- Bell Memorial Hospital
- Bi-County Hospital
- Borgess Medical Center
- Borgess/Pipp Health Center
- Botsford General Hospital
- Bronson Methodist Hospital
- Carson City Hospital
- Clinton Memorial Hospital
- Community Health Center of Branch Co
- Community Hospital/Watervliet
- Covenant Health Care System
- Crittenton Hospital
- Foote Memorial Hospital
- Garden City Osteopathic Hospital
- Genesys Regional Medical Ctr
- Grand View Hospital
- Gratiot Community Hospital
- Hackley Hospital
- Hayes Green Beach Hospital
- Henry Ford Hospital/Detroit
- Henry Ford Hospital/Wyandotte
- Hillsdale Comm. Health Ctr
- Holland Community Hospital
- Hurley Medical Center
- Huron Memorial Hospital
- Huron Valley/Sinai Hospital
- Hutzel Hospital
- Ingham Regional Medical Ctr
- Ionia County Memorial Hosp
- Keweenaw Memorial Medical Center
- Lakeland Medical Center/St. Joseph
- Lakeland Regional Health Systems/Niles
- Lakeshore Community Hosp.
- Lapeer Regional Hospital
- Lenawee Health Alliance/Herrick
- McKenzie Hospital
- McLaren Regional Medical Center
- McPherson Hospital
- Mecosta Co. General Hosp
- Memorial Medical Center of West Michigan
- Mercy General Health Partners
- Mercy Health Services/Cadillac
- Mercy Health Services/Grayling
- Mercy Hospital/Port Huron
- Mercy Memorial Hospital
- Metropolitan Hospital
- Mid MI Regional Medical Center/Clare
- Mt. Clemens General Hospital
- Munson Medical Center
- North Oakland Medical Center
- Oakwood Hospital-Annapolis Center
- Oakwood Hospital and Medical Center
- Otsego Memorial Hospital
- Owosso Memorial Healthcare Center
- Pennock Hospital
- Port Huron Hospital
- Portage Health System
- Riverside Osteopathic Hospital
- Sinai/Grace Hospital
- St. Francis Hospital
- St. John Detroit Riverview
- St. John Macomb Hospital
- St. John's River District Hosp
- St. Joseph Health System
- St. Joseph Mercy Hospital/Ann Arbor
- St. Joseph Mercy Hospital/Clinton Twp
- St. Mary's Hospital/Livonia
- St. Mary's Mercy Medical Ctr
- South Haven Community Hospital
- Spectrum Health/Blodgett
- Spectrum Health/Butterworth
- Sturgis Hospital
- Three Rivers Area Hospital
- United Memorial Hospital
- University of Michigan Hospitals & Health Centers
- War Memorial Hospital
- West Branch Regional Medical Center
- West Shore Hospital
- Zeeland Community Hospital

If your hospital is not listed here and your physicians have a policy of offering the first dose of the hepatitis B vaccine to all newborns before discharge, please let us know by calling Pat Fineis at 517-335-9443 or 800-964-4487 so that we can publicly acknowledge your commitment to a universal birth dose policy.

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