

Unprotected People #6

Hepatitis B

“All of the horrors that I endured could have been avoided”

U.S. Congressman John Joseph Moakley from Massachusetts was gravely ill with hepatitis B virus infection but fortunately received a successful liver transplant. Today, Congressman Moakley is a great advocate for hepatitis B vaccine. As he writes in the following letter, “All of the horrors that I endured could have been avoided if I had had available to me the very safe and effective vaccine against hepatitis B that now exists.” Here is Congressman Moakley’s story:

Don’t hesitate: Vaccinate!

Contributed by Joe Moakley, Member of Congress of the United States, House of Representatives, 9th District, Massachusetts

In the early 1980s, I was diagnosed with hepatitis B. It has never been determined where or how I contracted the virus. It may have been during a Congressional fact finding trip to China at that time. That is one of the very frightening facts about hepatitis B. While risk factors have been identified that are associated with viral transmission, up to 40% of the cases of hepatitis B in adults have no known risk factors associated with them.

By 1995, I was told by my doctors that I had about two months to live. In my case, the hepatitis B virus had led to cirrhosis of the liver and this vital organ had deteriorated beyond function. I was terribly ill. I had no strength and I had become severely jaundiced. But I was lucky; a liver transplant saved my life. Today I am happy, healthy and so grateful that I have been able to celebrate 25 years in the United States Congress.

Unfortunately, more than 1,250,000 Americans have hepatitis B, and up to 6,000 Americans every year die from the complications associated with the hepatitis B virus. All of the horrors that I endured could have been avoided if I had had available to me the very safe and effective vaccine against hepatitis B that now exists. The three shot series over a period of four to six months can protect most people from the agony of this disease.

I strongly encourage everyone to check with their provider about immunization against hepatitis B for themselves and for those they love. There is no reason for anyone to suffer from this totally preventable disease.