PROTECTION FROM HEPATITIS B

What is Hepatitis B?
Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease. It is caused by a virus and can result in permanent liver damage, or lead to other liver problems such as cirrhosis or cancer. To prevent the spread of this disease, community/public health nurses may offer vaccination to your child while in school. Before your child is vaccinated you will be asked to sign a consent form. A complete vaccine series for school aged children usually consists of two needles 4-6 months apart. Occasionally additional doses of the vaccine may be recommended, this is dependent on the person’s age and the reason for vaccination.

How is HEPATITIS B spread?
Hepatitis B can be spread by close contact with infected blood and body fluids such as semen and/or vaginal secretions or any other bodily fluids containing blood. People may have this disease without knowing it, and can pass it on to others. Hepatitis B is most commonly spread by sexual contact. Hepatitis B can also be spread through something as simple as an open cut or by the sharing needles or equipment used by others for the purpose of tattooing, body piercing or Glucometer readings. A mother may also pass the virus on to her baby during pregnancy and childbirth. In one third of hepatitis B cases the cause of this infection is unknown.

Why is this vaccination important?
Many new cases of hepatitis B occur every year in teenagers and young adults. Vaccinating school age children will help ensure they are protected before they are possibly exposed to the virus.

Is the Hepatitis B vaccine safe?
Yes, hepatitis B is a safe vaccine.

Why do you need two needles?
One needle will not provide full protection against hepatitis B. For long term protection the complete series is needed.

Are there any side effects?
Hepatitis B vaccine usually has no major side effects. A sore arm for a day or two is common, as well as a slight fever or tiredness.

Hepatitis B: The Facts
- Symptoms include tiredness, fever, and loss of appetite, yellow skin and eyes. These symptoms may last for weeks or months.
- Most will recover from the disease.
- Up to 10% of people who get hepatitis B will become carriers. This means they can still pass it on to others. It is difficult to treat hepatitis B if a person becomes a carrier.
- Over time carriers may develop severe liver damage such as cirrhosis or cancer.
- Hepatitis B is not spread by coughing, sneezing or hugging.
- If your child has already received a complete hepatitis B containing vaccine series (such as Twinrix) please discuss this with your child’s school nurse.

For additional information and services contact the Regional Health Authority in your area.