CDC Updates Hepatitis B Vaccine Guidelines

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In February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its vaccine recommendations for adults. Among the 13 vaccines included in the latest advisory are those for hepatitis A and B.

There are effective vaccines to prevent hepatitis A (spread by contaminated food or water) and hepatitis B (usually transmitted by contact with blood or by sex), including a combined A and B vaccine. There is currently no vaccine for hepatitis C.

The CDC recommends that people living with hepatitis C virus (HCV) get vaccinated against hepatitis B virus (HBV). The HBV vaccine is also recommended for people with other kinds of liver disease, including cirrhosis, fatty liver disease, alcoholic liver disease or unexplained high liver enzyme levels. HBV can cause more serious problems if people already have another liver disease.

The HBV vaccine requires three doses: The second dose is given one month after the first, and the third dose is given six months after the second. Since 1991, the vaccine has been recommended for infants in the United States, so many young adults have already been vaccinated.

In addition to people with liver disease, the CDC recommends the HBV vaccine for groups with higher than usual risk of becoming infected, including people with more than one sex partner, gay men, people living with HIV, people who inject drugs, people in jails and prisons, emergency service workers and people who travel to countries in regions where hepatitis B is common, such as sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia.

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