Should You Get the New Hepatitis B Vaccine?

A federal advisory panel has recommended a new vaccine against the virus specifically tailored to adults.

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Last week, a federal advisory panel recommended a new vaccine against hepatitis B virus (HBV). It's the first new shot of its kind in 25 years and is specifically tailored to adults, ABC News reports.

Called Heplisav-B, the vaccine is made by Dynavax Technologies Corp. and uses a new additive that helps boost the body's immune response. It is administered as two doses one month apart (much easier than the typical three doses over six months) and is recommended for adults at high risk for infection.

These high-risk groups include health care workers, prison inmates and people who inject drugs. Hepatitis B cases have been rising in recent years, a trend many experts have linked to the country's ongoing heroin and opioid epidemic. Researchers have also discovered that old HBV vaccines often falter in people with diabetes and in older adults and wanted to update the protective shot.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recently endorsed the vaccine during a meeting in Atlanta. Officials say the government usually adopts its recommendations.

Even so, it's important for consumers to note that before Dynavax's vaccine was initially licensed and approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last fall, a study found an unexpected number of heart attacks in people who got the vaccine. The company is conducting additional follow-up studies on possible side effects.

The shot is recommended for the prevention of infection caused by all known subtypes of hepatitis B in adults age 18 years and older.

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