Hepatitis B Vaccine Protection May Fade Among Kids on Immunosuppressants

A study found that young people treated with biologic drugs for inflammatory bowel disease or various rheumatologic conditions were at risk.

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Young people receiving immunosuppressant drugs, or biologics, for gastrointestinal or rheumatologic conditions may lose their hepatitis B virus (HBV) vaccine–prompted protection against the virus, MedPage Today reports. However, a booster vaccination may help them regain such protection.

Researchers analyzed HBV serology test results from 315 pediatric individuals who received intravenous biologic therapy for gastrointestinal or rheumatologic conditions at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center between October 2015 and June 2016. The average age of the individuals was 16. All had been vaccinated for HBV.

Findings were presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies meeting in San Francisco.

Two thirds of the individuals had inflammatory bowel disease (IBD); the remaining third had various rheumatologic conditions, primarily juvenile idiopathic arthritis.

Sixty-six percent of the young people with IBD and 70 percent of those treated for rheumatologic conditions had lost their protection against hep B, as reflected by a negative test result for the hep B surface antibody (HBsAb).

The older individuals were more likely to have lost protection; more than 80 percent of those 16 to 20 years old were not immune to hep B.

None of the individuals had active hep B infection.

More than half of the young people who lacked hep B immunity were given booster vaccinations for the virus. Of those with complete test results, 68 percent had regained their immunity to HBV.

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