



## Controlling Hepatitis B

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Recently, **Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Thailand** became the **first four countries in the World Health Organization's Southeast Asia region** to have successfully controlled **Hepatitis B**.

- When the disease prevalence is **reduced to less than 1% among children less than five years of age** the Hepatitis B virus is said to be **controlled**.
- **Hepatitis B** infection at a young age turns chronic, causing over 1,00,000 premature deaths annually from liver cirrhosis or liver cancer.
- Despite the introduction of hepatitis B vaccine in the **Universal Immunisation Programme in 2002** and **scaling-up nationwide in 2011**, about **one million people** in India become chronically infected with the virus **every year**.
- High prevalence among children aged less than five years **has not dropped below 1%** due to **suboptimal coverage of birth dose in all infants within 24 hours of birth**.
- Hepatitis B birth dose, given in the **first 24 hours**, helps to **prevent vertical transmission from mother to child**.
- Nearly, **70-90% newborns infected** and **20-30% carriers** are the result of Vertical Transmission of Hepatitis B, in India.
- Although the Health Ministry has approved the birth dose in 2008, its coverage remained low — 45% in 2015 and 60% in 2016 — according to a **2019 Health Ministry report**.
- Reasons for the low coverage are :
  - The **fear of wastage of vaccine** when a 10-dose vial is used.
  - Unawareness of health-care workers about WHO recommendation that allows **Hepatitis B Open-Vial Policy** which states that vaccine can be kept for a maximum duration of 28 days for use in other children if the vaccine meets certain conditions.

### Hepatitis B

- It is a **viral infection** that attacks the **liver** and can cause both **acute and chronic disease**.

- The virus is most commonly transmitted from **mother to child during birth** and delivery, as well as through **contact with blood or other body fluids**.
- It is the primary cause of **liver cancer**.
- Hepatitis B can be prevented by vaccines that are safe, available and effective.
- Every year, **World Hepatitis Day** is celebrated on the **28<sup>th</sup> of July**.
- It is among the four diseases apart from HIV-AIDS, TB, Malaria for which, the **World Health Organization (WHO)** officially endorses disease-specific global awareness days.

**Source:TH**