



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Myron Levin, MD
University of Colorado School of Medicine
4200 East Ninth Avenue C0227
Denver, CO 80262

Dear Myron:

RE: DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS ON HEPATITIS B IMMUNIZATION

As Public Health Officer of the New River Health District, one of 35 health districts of the Virginia Department of Health, I am writing to offer my perspective on the ACIP draft statement on hepatitis B immunization. I believe that better hepatitis B immunization rates are hindered by a negative association of the hepatitis B vaccine with sexually transmitted diseases. Destigmatization of hepatitis B vaccination could increase public awareness of its utility in the prevention of hepatitis B infection.

The ACIP draft statement recommends that patients being screened or treated for a sexually transmitted disease and those sexually at risk (i.e., men who have sex with men and heterosexual individuals who have more than one sex partner in a six months period) receive hepatitis B vaccine. Although I agree that these categories encompass a great number of the individuals at risk for hepatitis B infection, I feel that this recommendation strengthens the negative connotation of hepatitis B vaccination. One way to abolish this stigma while protecting patients at risk for hepatitis B infection would be to recommend age-based universal hepatitis B vaccination for adults.

An age-based universal recommendation for adults to be vaccinated against the hepatitis B virus would also protect the individuals who are sexually at risk but who have not been identified as such. It is apparent to me that health care practitioners are not always able to determine whether their patients are "sexually at risk" because their patients do not volunteer this information on a routine basis.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the public health perspective on the ACIP draft statement on hepatitis B immunization. I strongly believe that age-based universal hepatitis B vaccination of adults would protect individuals not identified as being sexually at risk for hepatitis B infection, as well as help to disassociate hepatitis B vaccination from sexually transmitted diseases. I hope that you will urge the ACIP to consider this strategy.

Sincerely,

Jody H. Hershey, MD, MPH
Director
New River Health District
Virginia Department of Health