EMPLOYEE FACT SHEET

HEPATITIS B

The Disease

Hepatitis B is a viral infection caused by Hepatitis B Virus, which is a major cause of liver disease throughout the world. Most people who contact Hepatitis B recover completely, but approximately 5-10% become chronic carriers of the virus or develop chronic liver disease. Most of the virus carriers have no symptoms, but can transmit the disease to others. Hepatitis B virus also appears to be a causative factor in the development of liver cancer. Thus, immunization against Hepatitis B can prevent acute Hepatitis and also reduce the risk of sickness and death from chronic active Hepatitis, cirrhosis, and liver cancer.

The Vaccine

Hepatitis B vaccine is a genetically-designed vaccine for vaccination against Hepatitis B. It does not contain plasma from chronic Hepatitis B virus carriers. It contains non-infectious subunits derived from Hepatitis B surface antigen, (HbsAG), genetic recombination in yeast cells (common baker’s yeast). The vaccine is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control for anyone at risk of coming in contact with infectious blood or blood products.

Possible Vaccine Side Effects

The incidence of side effects is very low. A few persons experience tenderness and redness at the site of the injection. Low-grade fever, weakness, headache, malaise, nausea, diarrhea, and pharyngitis may also occur. The possibility of more serious side effects may be identified with more extensive use. As with any vaccine, symptoms of immediate hypersensitivity reaction including rash, itching, hives, shortness of breath, palpitations, and rare instances of anaphylaxis have been reported within a few hours of vaccination. A delayed serum sickness-like syndrome of arthralgia, fever, and hives has also been reported.