

Vaccine Preventable Disease

Hepatitis A Vaccine

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Vaccines (also called “needles” or “shots”) are the best way to protect against some very serious infections.

Hepatitis A is the most common vaccine preventable disease in travelers. Receiving 2 doses of hepatitis A vaccine provides lifetime protection from Hepatitis A infection (one dose today, then again in 6-12 months). The hepatitis A vaccine is given to persons who meet the high risk criteria for the publicly funded immunizations for Ontario.

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that affects your liver. Although hepatitis A does not result in life-long infection, complete recovery from Hepatitis A can be slow. Infection usually begins 2 to 6 weeks after contact with the virus and symptoms include: weakness, fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting, fever, abdominal pain and loss of appetite, followed within a few days by jaundice (a yellowish colour of the skin and whites of the eyes). In children, especially in those younger than 6 years of age, there are often no obvious symptoms. However, infected children may shed the virus in their stools for months. Adults with Hepatitis A may be quite ill for up to 2 months and full recovery can take up to 6 months. Also, up to 25% of reported adult cases require hospitalization. There is no treatment for this infection. A person who recovers from the infection will have immunity for life. Occasionally, the infection causes severe liver damage and a small number of people with Hepatitis A can die.

Hepatitis A is spread by feces to mouth contact. This can occur:

- When hands become contaminated with the virus.
- By consuming food or water that has been contaminated by an infected person.
- By certain sexual practices.
- Occasionally, by injection drug equipment.
- The infection can be spread before symptoms develop and from those who do not develop symptoms

Who should receive the Hepatitis A Vaccine?

Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended to protect people two years of age and older at increased risk of infection. Hepatitis A vaccine is publicly funded for those who are extremely high risk for contracting Hepatitis A infection including: men who have sex with men, injection drug users and those with chronic liver disease including hepatitis C or B. Hepatitis A vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines. The following people should also consider being vaccinated:

- Anyone who would like to decrease his or her risk of being infected with Hepatitis A virus.
- Travelers to countries where Hepatitis A commonly occurs, especially when travel involves rural or primitive conditions
- Residents of places where hepatitis A commonly occurs
- Members of the military or other groups who may need to travel with short notice
- People who live in group settings where Hepatitis A is occurring
- People with hemophilia
- Zookeepers and veterinarians

Hepatitis A vaccine can also be given after contact with a person who has the Hepatitis A infection. Hepatitis A vaccine given as soon as possible after this contact will likely prevent the Hepatitis A infection from occurring.



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How well does Hepatitis A Vaccine protect me and my child?

Hepatitis A vaccine is more than 95% effective in preventing infection by one month after the first dose. Receiving 2 doses of hepatitis A vaccine provides lifetime protection. When Hepatitis A vaccine is given within one week of exposure to a person infected with Hepatitis A virus the vaccine is very effective at preventing infection.

Is the Hepatitis A Vaccine safe?

Yes. Serious side effects are rare. Mild pain, swelling and redness for a few days are common at the spot where the needle was given. Some people may experience a mild fever, tiredness, dizziness, headache, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Call your family health care provider or local hospital if your child has any of the following within three days of getting the needle:

- high fever (over 40 C or 104 F)
- crying for more than three hours
- convulsions or seizures
- very pale color and serious drowsiness
- hives
- swelling of the face or mouth
- trouble breathing
- other serious problems

Who should not get the Hepatitis A Vaccine?

Your family health care provider may decide not to give your child's needle or may give a different vaccine if your child has:

- A high fever or serious infection worse than a cold
 - Had an allergic reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis A vaccine.
 - A severe allergy to any parts of the vaccine such as: formaldehyde, aluminum, 2-phenoxyethanol, latex and an antibiotic called neomycin, polysorbate (only in Havrix), bovine albumin (only in VAQTA)

- Anyone who may be pregnant at the time of the vaccine unless felt to be indicated by their physician.

What else can I do to protect myself from Hepatitis A virus?

- Avoid contaminated/untreated food and water
- Drink bottled water and beverages (avoid ice cubes)
- Eat foods (hot foods hot) or fruits you peel
- Avoid eating fresh uncooked vegetables
- The Hepatitis A virus is inactivated by cooking/boiling to 85°C for 1 minute

Who should I talk to if I have any more questions about the Hepatitis A Vaccine?

Talk to your family health care provider or the Huron County Health Unit for more information.

Your Record of Protection?

After your child receives any immunization, make sure the doctor updates the yellow personal Immunization Record card. Keep it in a safe place!