



Hepatitis A Vaccine

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection caused by a virus which attacks the liver.

What are the symptoms?

Most people with Hepatitis A suffer flu-like symptoms including fever, headache and weakness. Other symptoms may include stomach cramps, diarrhoea and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and/or whites of the eyes). Hepatitis A will eventually run its course and lifelong immunity develops after infection. There are no long term consequences of Hepatitis A infection such as chronic hepatitis or cirrhosis. The severity of the disease varies with age. Adults develop more severe symptoms while young children may not show any outward signs of infection apart from feeling "unwell". Death is rare, but may occur in up to 1.8% of 50 years of age and older. Symptoms appear 15-50 days after exposure, average 28-30 days.

How is it spread?

Viral Hepatitis A can be spread many ways:

- Person-to-person by the faecal-oral route (virus is found in faeces (bowel movement) and can be passed on by an infected foodhandler or other hand/mouth contacts).
- Contaminated water and produce harvested from these waters.
- Contaminated food such as raw or undercooked seafood or shellfish.

How can Hepatitis A disease be prevented?

Hepatitis A can be prevented by vaccination against the disease. Other ways to reduce the chances of getting the disease include:

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, before preparing food and before eating.
- Avoid eating oysters, clams and other shellfish from contaminated waters.
- While travelling, take precautions with food and drink (ie. Avoid fruit that you can't peel, raw vegetables, salads, dairy products with unpasteurized milk).
- Swim in chlorinated pools.
- Consider Hepatitis A vaccination if travelling to an area where Hepatitis A occurs.

Who should be vaccinated?

Those eligible for publicly funded Hepatitis A vaccine:

- Individuals with chronic liver disease, including those with Hepatitis B or C.
- Intravenous drug users.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Household and sexual contacts of an acute case of Hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended, but not publicly funded for:

- Persons who will be travelling, living or working in areas where there is a higher prevalence of Hepatitis A.
- Armed forces personnel who travel to high risk areas where hygiene is poor.
- Residents and staff of institutions for the developmentally challenged where there is an ongoing problem with hepatitis A transmission.
- Specific population groups known to have a higher incidence of Hepatitis A (North American Indians, Inuit's, recognized community wide Hepatitis A epidemics).

Who should not get the vaccine?

- Children under one year of age.
- Persons with a known allergy to vaccine ingredients (i.e. aluminium hydroxide, neomycin).
- Persons with allergic reaction to a previous dose of Hepatitis A vaccine.
- Persons with severe febrile illness; however presence of a minor infection is not a contraindication.
- Pregnant women should consult their physician before getting the vaccine.

Are there any side effects from getting the vaccine?

Hepatitis A vaccine is well tolerated. Needle site reactions include soreness, swelling and redness. This should subside within 2 days. Other reactions may include headache, fatigue, fever, nausea, loss of appetite, and malaise within 24 to 48 hours. If you develop any signs of an allergic reaction such as hives, shortness of breath, etc. please go to the nearest hospital emergency department.

Record of Protection

After you/your child receive any vaccinations, make sure your doctor/nurse updates your copy of the vaccination record card. In addition, please report the vaccination to the Public Health Unit.

For more information, please contact a member of the Vaccine Preventable Disease Team by calling the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit at 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623.



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