

Hepatitis A Vaccine

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is hepatitis A vaccine?

Hepatitis A vaccine protects against infection from the hepatitis A virus. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

Who should get the hepatitis A vaccine?

Hepatitis A vaccine is given to those 6 months of age and older. The vaccine is given in 2 doses or shots. The second dose is given at least 6 months after the first.

Given recurring outbreaks of hepatitis A in B.C. aboriginal communities over the past 15 years, hepatitis A vaccine will be offered to aboriginal children living both on-reserve and off-reserve effective January 1, 2012.

The hepatitis A vaccine is provided free to people at high risk of infection, including:

- Those who have hemophilia or receive repeated infusions of blood or blood products
- Those who inject drugs or share drug snorting, smoking, or injecting equipment
- Males who have sex with other males
- Those with HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C infection, or chronic liver disease
- Those who have had a bone marrow or stem cell transplant
- Those who will have or have had a liver transplant
- Inmates of a correctional facility
- Close contacts of a person with hepatitis A infection. These include people living in the same house, sexual partners, close friends, and children in the same daycare.

- Those who have eaten food prepared by a food handler with hepatitis A infection.
- Aboriginal children and adolescents aged 6 months to 18 years. Babies get their first dose at 6 months of age and the second dose at 18 months. Older children need 2 doses of vaccine with at least 6 months between doses.

If you have been potentially exposed to hepatitis A, you should get one dose of the vaccine within 14 days of the exposure to prevent disease.

The vaccine is also recommended, but not provided free, for people likely to come in contact with or spread the hepatitis A virus, including:

- Those living, working or travelling in developing countries, particularly in rural areas
- Food handlers
- Those with multiple sex partners
- Residents and staff of institutions for the developmentally challenged with an ongoing problem with hepatitis A infection
- Zoo-keepers, veterinarians and researchers who handle primates
- Those involved in research on hepatitis A virus, or the production of hepatitis A vaccine.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

Benefits of hepatitis A vaccine

The vaccine is the best way to protect against hepatitis A infection.

When you get vaccinated, you help protect others as well.

Possible reactions after the vaccine

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get hepatitis A.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the shot was given. Headache, fatigue, fever, and stomach upset may also occur after getting the vaccine. These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol® can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

Who should not get the vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis A vaccine, or any component of the vaccine including neomycin, or to latex.

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that attacks the liver. For every 1,000 people infected, 1 to 3 will die. The death rate is higher in people 50 years of age and older.

The hepatitis A virus is found in the bowel movements (stool) of infected persons. People with hepatitis A infection who use the bathroom without proper hand washing can

pass the virus on to others through food preparation or other hand-to-mouth contact. The disease can also be spread by sexual contact, or sharing of equipment used in drug use, such as needles or pipes.

Hepatitis A can also be spread by drinking contaminated water, or by eating raw or undercooked shellfish, such as crabs, clams, oysters or mussels, that have been contaminated with sewage.

Mature minor consent

It is recommended that parents or guardians and their children discuss consent for immunization. Efforts are first made to seek parental/guardian or representative consent prior to immunization. However, children under the age of 19, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risk of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations.

For more information on immunizations visit Immunize BC at www.immunizebc.ca.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.



ImmunizeBC



BC Centre for Disease Control
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY