

Hepatitis A Vaccine

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

What is the hepatitis A vaccine?

The 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?

The hepatitis A vaccine is given to those 6 months of age and older. It is usually given as a series of 2 doses at least 6 months apart.

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

- Those who have hemophilia or receive repeated infusions of blood or blood products
- Those who inject illegal 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 had a stem cell transplant
- Those who will have or had a liver transplant
- Inmates of a correctional facility
- Those who are in close contact with persons infected by the hepatitis A virus – such as 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
- Indigenous 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

Individuals with HIV should get 3 doses of the vaccine. The second dose is given 1 month after the first dose. The third dose is given 5 months later.

If you may have been exposed to hepatitis A, you should get 1 dose of the vaccine within 14 days of the exposure to prevent disease. This is provided for free.

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 countries, particularly in rural areas, where hepatitis A is common
- Household or close contacts of adopted children from countries where hepatitis A is common
- Immigrants from countries where hepatitis A is common
- Food handlers
- Those with multiple sex partners
- Residents and staff of institutions caring for people with developmental challenges where there is ongoing hepatitis A infection
- Zoo-keepers, veterinarians and researchers who handle non-human 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.

What are the benefits of the hepatitis A vaccine?

The vaccine is the best way to protect against hepatitis A infection. When you get immunized, you help protect others as well.

What are the 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 vaccine

was given. Headache, fatigue, fever, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur after getting the vaccine. These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

For more information on Reye Syndrome, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye Syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility, less than 1 in a million, of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, your health care provider can treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number.

It is important to 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 part of the vaccine, including neomycin, or to latex.

There is no need to delay getting immunized because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you have concerns speak with your health care provider.

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that attacks the liver. Symptoms of hepatitis A may include fatigue, fever, nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite,

abdominal pain, dark urine, pale stools and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Some people, especially young children, may not have any symptoms. Hepatitis A infection rarely causes death; about 1 in 200 people infected with the virus will die. The risk of dying from hepatitis A infection is higher in people 50 years of age and older.

How is hepatitis A spread?

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 illegal drug use, such as needles or pipes.

Hepatitis A can also be spread by drinking contaminated water, or by eating raw or under-cooked 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. 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 mature minor consent see [HealthLinkBC File #119 The Infants Act, Mature Minor Consent and Immunization](#).

For more information on immunizations visit ImmunizeBC at <https://immunizebc.ca/>.



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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