

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. Usually 2 doses are given at least 6 months apart.

The hepatitis A vaccine is provided free to Indigenous children and youth 6 months to 18 years of age.

The vaccine is also 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
- Inject illegal drugs or share drug snorting, smoking, or injecting equipment
- Are males who have sex with other males
- Have HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C infection, or chronic liver disease
- Had a stem cell transplant
- Will have or had a liver transplant
- Are inmates of a correctional facility
- Are in close contact with infected persons
- Have eaten food prepared by a food handler with hepatitis A infection

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

- Those who will be living, working or traveling in countries, particularly in rural areas, where hepatitis A is common
- Immigrants from countries where hepatitis A is common
- Household or close contacts of adopted children from areas where it is common
- Food handlers
- Those with multiple sex partners
- Residents and staff of institutions caring for people with developmental challenges where there is ongoing infection
- Zoo-keepers, veterinarians and researchers handling non-human primates
- Those involved in research on the 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. You may have headache, fatigue, fever, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. 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. There is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This happens in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine. Symptoms 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.

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 latex.

There is no need to delay vaccination if you have a cold or other mild illness. If concerned, speak with your health care provider.

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that attacks the liver. Symptoms 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, have no symptoms. Hepatitis A infection rarely causes death. About 1 in 200 infected people will die. The risk is higher if you are 50 years or older.

How is hepatitis A spread?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the bowel movements (stool) of infected persons. It can be spread through close contact with an infected person, by drinking contaminated water, or eating raw or under-cooked shellfish contaminated with sewage. People with hepatitis A infection who use the bathroom without proper hand washing can pass it to others through food preparation or other hand-to-mouth contact. Sexual contact, or sharing equipment used in illegal drug use like needles or pipes can also spread it.

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](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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