

Hepatitis A Vaccine

Public Health – Factsheet

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention. Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that attacks the liver. Hepatitis A can make a person feel very tired and have a fever, upset stomach and loss of appetite. People with the virus can also have yellow skin and eyes (jaundice). Some people never know they have hepatitis A because they don't get sick. But, people that don't get sick can still pass Hepatitis A to others.

Hepatitis A is more common in young children than it is in older people. But usually young children don't get sick from the virus.

There are other types of hepatitis, such as hepatitis B and hepatitis C. The hepatitis A vaccine will only provide protection against the hepatitis A virus.

How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis A can be spread through contact with an infected person's feces (i.e. bowel movement) or, by drinking/eating contaminated food or water. For these reasons, proper hand washing after using the bathroom and before touching food is very important. Hepatitis A can also pass from person to person through some forms of sexual contact or from sharing needles with someone who may be infected with hepatitis A.

Who should get the Hepatitis A vaccine?

Immunization is the best way to protect against hepatitis A.

When you are immunized, you also help protect others because someone who is immunized is less likely to spread the virus. It is especially important for people 12 months of age and older to get immunized against hepatitis A if they are:

- The caregiver, friend and/or family of a person who has hepatitis A
- Living with a health condition that affects their liver (e.g. hepatitis C)
- Going to a country where hepatitis A is common
- Working in health care (e.g. hospital)
- Participating in risky behaviour (e.g. street drug use, risky sexual practices)

Talk to your doctor, public health nurse or nurse practitioner to see if you are eligible to receive the hepatitis A vaccine free-of-charge.

Or visit:

Manitoba Public Health website

www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html

Who should NOT get the Hepatitis A vaccine?

Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to any of the contents of the vaccine.

Anyone who has a high fever should wait until they feel better to be immunized. The vaccine can still be given if the illness is mild, like a cold.

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Possible side effects of the hepatitis A vaccine

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

Common reactions to the vaccine include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Some people may have fever, drowsiness, dizziness or an upset stomach. These are mild reactions and usually last one to two days. Acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Tempra®) can be given for fever or soreness.

ASA (Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a bad allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty breathing or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.**

Report any serious or unexpected side effects to a public health nurse or doctor.

Your record of protection

Make sure your doctor or public health nurse updates your (or your child's) immunization record card after receiving any immunization. Keep the card in a safe place!

Information about the immunizations you or your child receives may be recorded in the Manitoba Immunization Monitoring System (MIMS). This computerized database allows your doctor or public health nurse to find out what immunizations you or your child has had or needs to have. Information collected in MIMS may be used to produce immunization records, or notify you, your doctor or public health nurse if you or your child has missed a particular immunization. Manitoba Health may use the information to monitor how well different vaccines work in preventing disease. If you need information on the immunizations that you or your child has received, contact your doctor, local public health unit or nursing station.

For more information on the hepatitis A vaccine:

Talk to your doctor, public health nurse or nurse practitioner.

Call Health Links-Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.

Or visit:

Public Health Agency of Canada website
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php