



Hepatitis A (Hep-A)

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (H.A.V.). H.A.V. is found in the stool of persons with hepatitis A. It is usually spread by close personal contact and sometimes by eating food or drinking water containing H.A.V.

Hepatitis A can cause:

- Mild “flu-like” illness,
- Jaundice (yellow skin or eyes),
- Severe stomach pains and diarrhea.
- People with hepatitis A often have to be hospitalized (up to about 1 person in 5).
- Sometimes, hepatitis A causes death (about 100 per year in the U.S.).
- A person who has hepatitis A can easily pass the disease to others within the same household.

Who should get hepatitis A vaccine and when?

- Persons 1 years of age and older traveling to or working in countries with high or intermediate prevalence of hepatitis A, such as those located in Central or South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, Asia (except Japan), Africa, and eastern Europe.

- Hepatitis A vaccine might be recommended for children or adolescents in communities where outbreaks of hepatitis A are occurring.

- Persons with chronic liver disease.

- Persons who are treated with clotting factor concentrates.

Two doses of the vaccine are needed for lasting protection. These doses should be given at least 6 months apart.

Some people should not get hepatitis A vaccine or should wait.

- Anyone who has ever had a severe (life-threatening) allergic reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis A vaccine should not get another dose.

- Anyone who has a severe (life threatening) allergy to any vaccine component should not get the vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies. Some hepatitis A vaccine contains alum and 2-phenoxyethanol.

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- Anyone who moderately or severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled should probably wait until they recover.
- The safety of hepatitis A vaccine for pregnant women has not been determined. But there is no evidence that it is harmful to either pregnant women or their unborn babies. The risk, if any, is thought to be very low.

What are the risks from hepatitis A vaccine?

A vaccine, like any medicine, could possibly cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of hepatitis A vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.

Getting hepatitis A vaccine is much safer than getting the disease.

Mild problems

- Soreness where the shot was given (about 1 out of 2 adults and up to 1 out of 5 children)
- Headache (about 1 out of 6 adults and 1 out of 20 children)
- Loss of appetite (about 1 out of 12 children)
- Tiredness (about 1 out of 14 adults)

If these problems occur, they usually last for 1 or 2 days.

Severe problems

- Serious allergic reaction, within a few minutes to a few hours of the shot (very rare).

What if there is a moderate or severe problem?

- Any unusual condition, such as a high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a serious allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness.

What should I do?

- Call a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
- Ask us or health department to report the reaction by filing a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form. Or you can file this report through the VAERS web site at [w.w.w. dot v.a.e.r.s. dot o.r.g.](http://www.vaers.org), or by calling 1-800-822-7967.

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