

HEPATITIS A VACCINE INFORMATION SHEET

Main points

- Hepatitis A is caused by a virus spread by contact or ingestion of faecally contaminated water/food or through contact with the faeces of a person infected with hepatitis A.
- At least 7 in 10 adult patients develop jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), fever, anorexia (decreased appetite), nausea, vomiting, hepatic (liver) pain and malaise (tiredness).
- About 1 in 5 people who receive the vaccine will have local swelling, redness or pain at the injection site.
- Serious reactions are very rare.

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 under-cooked shellfish, such as crabs, crayfish, oysters or mussels, that have been contaminated with sewage.

Who should get the hepatitis A vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended and funded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at 18 months of age.

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

- people living, working or travelling in developing countries, particularly in rural areas;
- Food handlers;
- people 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.

The vaccine is administered as a course of 2 doses given 6 months apart.

What are the benefits of getting the hepatitis A vaccine?

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

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

What are 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.

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 000. This reaction can be treated, and it occurs in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to VaxWorks Health Services on 1300 34 84 22 or to your GP.

Who should not get the hepatitis A vaccine?

Speak with clinic staff if you 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.

Hepatitis A vaccine is not routinely given to pregnant women.

There is no need to delay getting immunised because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you have concerns, speak with the clinic staff.