



Many People Forgo Hepatitis A Vaccine Despite Its Ability to Prevent Death

Most hepatitis A-related deaths during widespread community outbreaks spanning 2016 to 2022 could have been prevented via vaccination.

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Despite the availability of effective vaccines for [hepatitis A virus](#) (HAV), many people eligible to receive the vaccine are not doing so, according to a [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hepatitis can be caused by several factors, including toxins, excess alcohol use, autoimmune diseases, fat in the liver and viruses. The most common hepatitis viruses are spread via contaminated food and water (hepatitis A) and shared needles and sex (hepatitis B and C).

HAV is an acute form of hepatitis, meaning that it does not cause long-term, or chronic, infection. It is spread from one person to another when the fecal matter of someone with HAV gets into another person's mouth, which can happen in a number of ways, including eating food handled or prepared by someone with hepatitis A. If you have had HAV once, you cannot be infected with the virus again. However, you can still be infected with other hepatitis viruses, such as [hepatitis B virus](#) and [hepatitis C virus](#).

The long-term study found that from August 2016 to October 2022, a period spanning widespread community outbreak in the United States, 315 people died of HAV in 27 states. About 63% of those who died had at least one documented preexisting indication for the HAV vaccine, such as drug use, homelessness or coinfection with hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Only about 4% had evidence of previous HAV vaccination, according to the report.

The death toll peaked in 2019 and then decreased annually through 2022. Deaths were most common among men, non-Hispanic white people and those ages 50 and older.

As of October 2023, 34 states have declared an end to their HAV outbreaks, investigators said. Yet many adults who use drugs, experience homelessness or have chronic liver disease remain at increased risk.

To prevent future HAV deaths, report authors emphasize the need for increased hepatitis A vaccination coverage, particularly among adults with increased risk for infection with HAV or for

severe disease from infection.

To learn more, click [#Hepatitis A](#) or [Health Basics on Hepatitis A](#). It reads in part:

Not everyone who contracts hepatitis A virus will experience noticeable symptoms. For example, many babies and young children with HAV do not experience any symptoms of infection. Symptoms are much more likely to occur in older children, adolescents and adults.

Symptoms of hepatitis A (and acute hepatitis in general) can include:

- Yellowing of the skin, whites of the eyes and under the fingernails (jaundice)
- Feeling tired and rundown (fatigue)
- Pain in the upper-right abdomen
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Fever
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Dark urine and/or pale stool
- Joint pain.

It can take the immune system up to eight weeks to clear HAV from the body. If symptoms occur, they usually do so within two to four weeks after infection. The symptoms of hepatitis A can last anywhere from a week to more than a month. About 15% of people with hepatitis A experience symptoms that last between six to nine months.

The usual treatment for hepatitis A is bed rest. It is also important to drink plenty of fluids, particularly if you are experiencing diarrhea or vomiting. Over-the-counter pain relievers, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.), can help manage some of the symptoms of hepatitis A, although it's best to consult with your health care provider before using any medications.