



Hepatitis A

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is to be vaccinated. Two HAV vaccines are available: Havrix and Vaqta. Both of these vaccines require two injections, usually administered six months apart. A combination vaccine for HAV and hepatitis B virus (Twinrix) is also available.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends routine hepatitis A vaccination for:

- All 1 year-old children.
- Those who may be at risk for hepatitis A-related complications.
- People who are at risk for infection or who want protection against hep A.

Hepatitis A vaccination is specifically recommended for:

- Anyone who has come in to direct contact with someone who has hepatitis A.
- Adults and children traveling to or working in countries with high or intermediate prevalence of hepatitis A, such as those in Central or South America, Mexico, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.
- Children and adolescents up to age 18 who live in states or communities where routine vaccination has been implemented because of high disease rates.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People using street drugs.
- Anyone with an occupational risk for hepatitis A.
- Persons with chronic liver disease, such as fatty liver disease, alcoholic liver disease, and hepatitis B or C.
- People who are treated with clotting factor drugs.

The hepatitis A vaccine is very effective. More than 99 percent of people who are vaccinated develop immunity against the virus and will never get hep A even if they are exposed to it.

If side effects from the hepatitis A vaccine occur, they are usually mild and may include soreness at the injection site and mild flu-like symptoms.

Even if you haven't been vaccinated against hepatitis A, you can take steps to prevent HAV infection:

- Avoid water that could be contaminated with fecal matter.
- Avoid undercooked or raw shellfish.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom or changing a diaper and before preparing and eating food.
- Use a latex barrier—such as a dental dam—for oral-anal sex (“rimming”).

Anyone who was exposed recently to HAV and hasn't been vaccinated should be administered one dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG) as soon as possible, within 2 weeks after exposure.

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