# HEPATITIS A VACCINE

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Many Vaccine Information Statements are available in Spanish and other languages. See www.immunize.org/vis.

## 1 What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV 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 HAV.

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, people die as a result of hepatitis A (about 3-5 deaths per 1,000 cases).

A person who has hepatitis A can easily pass the disease to others within the same household.

**Hepatitis A vaccine can prevent hepatitis A.**

## 2 Who should get hepatitis A vaccine and when?

**WHO?**

Some people should be routinely vaccinated with hepatitis A vaccine:

- All children 1 year (12 through 23 months) of age.
- Persons 1 year 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, Mexico, Asia (except Japan), Africa, and eastern Europe. For more information see **www.cdc.gov/travel**.
- Children and adolescents through 18 years of age who live in states or communities where routine vaccination has been implemented because of high disease incidence.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Persons who use street drugs.
- Persons with chronic liver disease.
- Persons who are treated with clotting factor concentrates.
- Persons who work with HAV-infected primates or who work with HAV in research laboratories.

Other people might get hepatitis A vaccine in special situations:

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

*Hepatitis A vaccine is not licensed for children younger than 1 year of age.*

**WHEN?**

For children, the first dose should be given at 12-23 months of age. Children who are not vaccinated by 2 years of age can be vaccinated at later visits.

For travelers, the vaccine series should be started at least one month before traveling to provide the best protection.

> Persons who get the vaccine less than one month before traveling can also get a shot called immune globulin (IG). IG gives immediate, temporary protection.

For others, the hepatitis A vaccine series may be started whenever a person is at risk of infection.

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

Hepatitis A vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

## 3 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. All hepatitis A vaccines contain alum and some hepatitis A vaccines contain 2-phenoxyethanol.
- Anyone who is **moderately or severely ill** at the time the shot is scheduled should probably wait until they recover. Ask your doctor or nurse. People with a **mild illness** can usually get the vaccine.
- Tell your doctor if you are **pregnant**. 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.

## 4 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 6 children)*
- headache *(about 1 out of 6 adults and 1 out of 25 children)*
- loss of appetite *(about 1 out of 12 children)*
- tiredness *(about 1 out of 14 adults)*

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

### Severe problems

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

## 5 What if there is a moderate or severe reaction?

### What should I look for?

- 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.
- **Tell** your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.
- **Ask** your doctor, nurse, 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 www.vaers.hhs.gov, or by calling 1-800-822-7967.

  *VAERS does not provide medical advice.*

## 6 The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

In the event that you or your child has a serious reaction to a vaccine, a federal program has been created to help pay for the care of those who have been harmed.

For details about the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, call 1-800-338-2382 or visit their website at www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation.

## 7 How can I learn more?

- Ask your doctor or nurse. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - Call **1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO)**
  - Visit CDC websites at: **www.cdc.gov/hepatitis** or **www.cdc.gov/vaccines**

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