

# Hepatitis A Vaccine (HAV)

**Immunization protects you from disease. Get protected, get immunized.**

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger by building antibodies, which help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get this disease.

## Who should have HAV vaccine?

This vaccine is given to people with liver problems and to those at risk for contact with the hepatitis A virus.

Talk to a public health nurse to find out if you qualify for HAV vaccine for free. A blood test may be needed to check if you need the vaccine (are not already protected).

Some people (e.g., travellers) may benefit from HAV vaccine, but it is not free. Check with your health insurance provider as some plans may cover the cost.

## How many doses of this vaccine are needed?

Most people need 2 doses, which are given 6 to 18 months apart.

## Are there other vaccines that protect against hepatitis A?

Some people may have already received hepatitis A vaccine as part of a combined vaccine with hepatitis B (e.g., Twinrix®) or as part of a combined vaccine with typhoid (Vivaxim®).

Check with your healthcare provider to find out if you need more doses.

## How well does the vaccine work?

If you are immunized before contact with the hepatitis A virus, the vaccine is about 90% to 97% effective in preventing the illness.

The vaccine is about 80% effective if it is given within 1 week after contact with the virus.

## Where can I get the vaccine?

Anyone who qualifies for free vaccine can contact the public health office in their area.

If you do not qualify for free vaccine, you need to pay for it and should contact a travel health clinic (e.g., [AHS Travel Health Services](#)) or speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

## Are there side effects from HAV vaccine?

Reactions to the vaccine are usually mild and go away in a few days. They may include:

- redness, swelling, and discomfort where the needle was given
- feeling tired or irritable
- headache or dizziness
- body aches or stiffness
- fever
- poor appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, or diarrhea
- rash
- sore throat, cough, or runny nose

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after immunization because people can have a rare but serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). If anaphylaxis happens, you will be given medicine to treat the symptoms.

Unusual reactions can happen. Call Health Link at 811 to report any unusual reactions.

## How can I manage side effects?

- To help with discomfort and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area.
- If you need fever or pain medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 19 years old because it can cause serious health problems.
- Some people with health problems (e.g., weak immune system) must call their doctor whenever they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor—even if you think the fever was due to immunization.

## Is there anyone who cannot have HAV vaccine?

You may not be able to have the vaccine if you:

- have an allergy to parts of the vaccine—always tell your healthcare provider about allergies.
- had a severe or unusual reaction after this vaccine (or a similar one)—always tell your healthcare provider if you have had reactions.

You can be immunized if you have a mild illness (e.g., cold), even if you have a fever.

## For More Information



Call Health Link at **811**



Go to [immunizealberta.ca](http://immunizealberta.ca)



Go to [myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca)

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# Quick Facts: Hepatitis A

## What it is

- a virus that causes poor appetite, nausea, tiredness, fever, and yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- symptoms can be serious and last for months
- 1 out of 4 adults need to be admitted to the hospital
- can lead to death in rare cases

## Who is most at risk

People who have the highest risk of getting hepatitis A are those who:

- live in, travel to, or adopt children from countries or communities with high rates of hepatitis A disease
- have lifestyle risks of infection (street drug use, men who have sex with men)
- need some types of treatments for a bleeding disorder
- have contact with the virus at work (e.g., researchers, people who work with monkeys or other non-human primates)

People who have other liver problems, have a weak immune system, or are over 60 years of age are at higher risk for serious illness if they get hepatitis A.

## How it spreads

- spread by infected stool getting onto hands or into food and water, and then into the mouth
- some people do not have symptoms but can spread disease