

# Hepatitis A (HAV) Vaccine

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

- **Vaccines make your immune system stronger. They build antibodies to help prevent diseases.**
- **Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get this disease.**

## **What is the HAV vaccine?**

The HAV vaccine protects against the hepatitis A virus.

## **Who should have the HAV vaccine?**

People with liver problems and people who are at risk for contact with the hepatitis A virus get this vaccine.

Talk to a public health nurse to find out if you can get the HAV vaccine for free. You may need a blood test to check if you are already protected.

You may also benefit from the vaccine if you travel to an area that has a high risk of hepatitis A. If you get the vaccine because of travel, it is not free.

If you cannot get the vaccine for free, check with your health insurance provider to see if your plan covers the cost.

## **How many doses do I need?**

Most people need 2 doses, which are given at least 6 months apart.

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

There are 2 other vaccines that protect against hepatitis A.

**Twinrix** protects against the hepatitis A and B viruses. People who travel often get this vaccine.

**Vivaxim** protects against the hepatitis A virus and the bacteria that causes typhoid fever. Some people who travel may get this vaccine.

If you have already had these vaccines you may not need the HAV vaccine. Check with your healthcare provider to find out if you need more doses.

## **How well does the vaccine work?**

If you are immunized before you have contact with the hepatitis A virus, the protection is about 90% to 97%.

If you get this vaccine within 1 week after contact with hepatitis A virus, the protection is about 80%.

## **Where can I get the HAV vaccine?**

If you can get this vaccine for free, contact the public health office in your area.

If you want the vaccine and need to pay for it, contact a travel health clinic or talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

## **Are there side effects from the HAV vaccine?**

There can be side effects from the HAV vaccine, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- redness, swelling, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- feeling tired or getting upset easily
- headache
- feeling dizzy
- body aches or stiffness
- fever
- not feeling hungry or not wanting to eat (poor appetite)
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), stomach pain, vomiting, or loose stool (diarrhea)
- rash
- sore throat, cough, runny nose

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after your vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

## How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dosage to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Children under the age of 18 years should **not** take aspirin because it can cause serious health problems.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

## Who should not have the HAV vaccine?

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

- have an allergy to parts of the vaccine
- had a severe or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it

Check with your doctor or a public health nurse before you get the vaccine.

You can still have the vaccine if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever. Always tell your healthcare provider if you have allergies or if you have had a side effect from a vaccine in the past.

## For More Information



Call Health Link at **811**



Go to **ImmunizeAlberta.ca**



Go to **MyHealth.Alberta.ca**

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# Facts about hepatitis A

## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection in the liver that is caused by a virus. Symptoms include poor appetite, nausea, feeling tired, fever, and yellow skin and eyes (jaundice). The symptoms can be serious and last for months.

One out of 4 adults who get hepatitis A need to be admitted to a hospital. It is rare, but you can die from hepatitis A infection.

## Who is most at risk?

You are at high risk of getting hepatitis A if you:

- live in or travel to an area that has a high risk of hepatitis A
- adopt children from countries or communities with a high risk of hepatitis A
- have a lifestyle that puts you at risk of getting the infection, such as using street drugs
- are a man who has sex with men
- need certain treatments for a bleeding disorder
- have contact with the virus at work, such as some researchers and people who work with monkeys or other non-human primates

People who have liver problems, have a weak immune system, or are over age 60 years are at higher risk for getting seriously ill if they get hepatitis A.

## How does it spread?

Hepatitis A spreads through infected stool getting onto hands or into food and water, and then into the mouth.

Some people do not have symptoms but can still spread the disease.