

Fact Sheet

October 2010

The Hepatitis A Vaccine

What is Hepatitis A?

- The Hepatitis A virus causes a temporary infection in the liver.

How can I get Hepatitis A?

- Hepatitis A is found in the stool (bowel movements) of persons infected with the virus.
- Hepatitis A is spread from person to person by putting anything in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with Hepatitis A (also known as the “fecal-oral” route). Even microscopic contamination can spread the virus.
- You can’t get the Hepatitis A virus by sneezing, coughing, hugging or sitting next to an infected person.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

- Many infants and young children will have no symptoms.
- Symptoms may include fever, loss of appetite, tiredness, nausea, vomiting and jaundice (yellowing of skin or eyes).
- Symptoms are more severe in adults.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

- A vaccine is available that can prevent Hepatitis A infection if it is given early enough.

Why do I need the shot today?

- To protect yourself from Hepatitis A infection.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

- Most people have no side effects.
- A few get some pain and redness where they got the shot.
- A few get a mild fever and headache in the days after getting the shot.
- Rarely, someone may get a more serious allergic reaction to the vaccine such as difficulty breathing, swelling in the mouth or hives.
- Seek medical attention if you are having a severe allergic reaction or if side effects last more than 2 days.

Who should NOT get the vaccine?

- If you have had Hepatitis A infection before or received 2 shots of the Hepatitis A vaccine.
- If you had a severe reaction to the Hepatitis A vaccine or another vaccine in the past.
- If you are allergic to neomycin (an antibiotic).
- Infants less than 12 months of age.

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What happens if I can't get the Hepatitis A vaccine?

- For individuals who cannot get the vaccine, a “shot” called an immune globulin can be given.
- Immune globulin is a sterile preparation of antibodies that can lower the risk of infection for about 3 to 5 months.
- Speak to your health care provider for more information.

How long will this vaccine protect me against Hepatitis A?

- One dose of Hepatitis A vaccine will protect you for at least 1 year.
- A second dose in 6 to 12 months will protect you for life. You can see your doctor to get the second dose, which is not provided by Toronto Public Health.

Can I get Hepatitis A more than once?

- No. Once you have had Hepatitis A infection you cannot get it again.
- If you have already been exposed to Hepatitis A, the vaccine may not prevent you from getting sick.

What can I do to prevent Hepatitis A infection?

- Always **wash your hands** with soap and warm water after using the toilet, changing a diaper and before and after eating or preparing food.
- Wash uncooked food thoroughly before use, especially fruits, vegetables and shellfish.
- Cook all foods thoroughly.

Where can I find more information?

- Call Toronto Health Connection: 416-338-7600
- Visit our website at www.toronto.ca/health.