

Hepatitis A Vaccine

WHAT IS THE VACCINE?

The Hepatitis A vaccine protects you from getting a disease called Hepatitis A. It works by helping the body to produce antibodies. This vaccine is given by a needle in the upper arm.

The vaccine is available free of charge to people who are most at risk for this virus. It will also be given to people who are likely to suffer the most serious health problems if they are infected by the Hepatitis A virus. People who can get the vaccine free are:

- Men who have sex with men
- Injection drug users
- Non-injection drug users who share paraphernalia (e.g., crack pipes, straws)
- people with chronic liver disease, such as Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C
- household or sexual contacts of people who have acute Hepatitis A

For anyone not in these groups, they can get the vaccine from their family doctor or a travel clinic. There is a charge. The vaccine is recommended for anyone who travels or works in countries with high rates of Hepatitis A infection, or anyone who engages in anal sex play.

HOW DOES THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE WORK?

Hepatitis A vaccine protects you from becoming infected by the virus. Two (2) doses of the vaccine, given 6 to 12 months apart are needed to provide immunity. The vaccine's protection begins about 2 weeks after the first dose. It is estimated that the vaccine will provide protection for up to 20 years, after receiving the second dose.

(please turn over)

ARE THERE REASONS NOT TO RECEIVE THE VACCINE?

You should **not** have the vaccine if you:

- are sensitive to any component of the vaccine -- formaldehyde, neomycin, aluminum hydroxide (deodorants, antacids) 2-phenoxyethanol

You must be assessed by a doctor prior to being vaccinated if you:

- may have a fever
- are pregnant or breastfeeding (Vaccination may still be considered if you are at high risk for Hepatitis A.)
- are taking medication or have a chronic health condition that will lower your immune system

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS?

Most common: Soreness and redness in the upper arm at the injection site. These side effects usually goes away within a few days.

Uncommon: Fever, headache, fatigue, abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, skin rash.

Extremely rare: Severe allergic reactions. Immediate medical care is needed if you develop hives, wheezing, breathing difficulty or swelling of the face or mouth.

Remember to get immediate medical help if you have a serious reaction. Once you are better, call the clinic and/or your family doctor to tell them of your reaction. This will help your doctor to keep a record of the reaction.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**Call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at 416-392-2437
or go to
www.toronto.ca/health**

SAFER SEX

To reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), use a condom every time you have genital contact, vaginal, anal or oral sex.