

Vaccine Information Statement

Hepatitis A Vaccine: What You Need to Know

Many Vaccine Information Statements are available in Spanish and other languages. See www.immunize.org/vis.
Hojas de información Sobre Vacunas están disponibles en español y en muchos otros idiomas. Visite www.immunize.org/vis

1. Why get vaccinated?

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease. It is caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV is found in the stool of people who are infected with hepatitis A. It is usually spread by close personal contact, and can pass easily from one person to another. You can also get hepatitis A from food or water contaminated with HAV.

Symptoms of hepatitis A can include:

- fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and/or joint pain
- severe stomach pains and diarrhea (mainly in children), or
- jaundice (yellow skin or eyes, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements).

These symptoms usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after exposure and last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill for as long as 6 months. If you have hepatitis A you may be too ill to work.

Children often do not have symptoms, but most adults do. You can spread hepatitis A without having symptoms.

Hepatitis A can cause liver failure and death, although this is rare and occurs more commonly in persons 50 years of age or older and persons with other liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or C.

Hepatitis A vaccine can prevent hepatitis A. Hepatitis A vaccines were introduced in 1995-96. Since then, the number of cases reported each year in the United States has dropped from around 31,000 cases to fewer than 1,500 cases.

2. Hepatitis A vaccine

Hepatitis A vaccine is an inactivated (killed) vaccine. You will need **2 doses** for long-lasting protection. These doses should be given at least 6 months apart.

Children are routinely vaccinated between their first and second birthdays (12 through 23 months of age). Older children and adolescents can get the vaccine after 23 months. Adults who have not been vaccinated previously and want to be protected against hepatitis A can also get the vaccine.

You should get hepatitis A vaccine if you:

- are traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common,
- are a man who has sex with other men,
- use illegal drugs,

- have a chronic liver disease such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C,
 - are being treated with clotting-factor concentrates,
 - work with hepatitis A-infected animals or in a Hepatitis A research laboratory, or
 - expect to have close personal contact with an international adoptee.
- Ask your healthcare provider if you want more information about any of these groups.

You can get hepatitis A vaccine at the same time as other vaccines.

3. Some people should not get this vaccine

Tell the person who is giving you the vaccine:

- **If you have any severe, life-threatening allergies.**
If you ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of hepatitis A vaccine, or have a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine, you may be advised not to get vaccinated.
- **If you are not feeling well.**
It is usually okay to get hepatitis A vaccine when you have a mild illness, but you might be asked to come back when you feel better.

4. Risks of a vaccine reaction

With any medicine, including vaccines, there is a chance of reactions. These are usually mild and go away on their own, but serious reactions are also possible.

Most people who get hepatitis A vaccine do not have any problems with it.

Minor problems following hepatitis A vaccine include:

- soreness where the shot was given
- headache
- loss of appetite
- tiredness

If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and last 1 or 2 days.

Problems that could happen after any injected vaccine:

- People sometimes faint after a medical procedure, including vaccination. Sitting or lying down for about 15 minutes can help prevent fainting, and injuries caused by a fall. Tell your doctor if you feel dizzy, or have vision changes or ringing in the ears.
- Some people get severe pain in the shoulder and have difficulty moving the arm where a shot was given. This happens very rarely.
- Any medication can cause a severe allergic reaction. Such reactions from a vaccine are very rare, estimated at about 1 in a million doses, and would happen within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

As with any medicine, there is a very remote chance of a vaccine causing a serious injury or death.

The safety of vaccines is always being monitored. For more information, visit: www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/

5. What if there is a serious problem?

What should I look for?

- Look for anything that concerns you, such as signs of a severe allergic reaction, very high fever, or unusual behavior.

Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, and weakness – usually within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

What should I do?

- If you think it is a severe allergic reaction or other emergency that can't wait, call 9-1-1 and get the person to the nearest hospital. Otherwise, call your doctor.
- Reactions should be reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Your doctor should file this report, or you can do it yourself through the VAERS web site at www.vaers.hhs.gov, or by calling **1-800-822-7967**.

VAERS does not give medical advice.

6. The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) is a federal program that was created to compensate people who may have been injured by certain vaccines.

Persons who believe they may have been injured by a vaccine can learn about the program and about filing a claim by calling **1-800-338-2382** or visiting the VICP website at www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation. There is a time limit to file a claim for compensation.

7. How can I learn more?

- Ask your healthcare provider. He or she 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)** or
 - Visit CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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