

## **Hepatitis A Vaccine: What you need to know**

### **1. What is hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV is found in the stool of people with hepatitis A.

It is usually spread by close personal contact and sometimes by eating food or drinking water containing HAV. A person who has hepatitis A can easily pass the disease to others within the same household.

Hepatitis A can cause:

- “flu-like” illness
- jaundice (yellow skin or eyes, dark urine)
- severe stomach pains and diarrhea (children)

People with hepatitis A often have to be hospitalized.

Adults with hepatitis A are often too ill to work for up to a month.

### **2. Who should get hepatitis A vaccine and when?**

#### **WHO**

*Some people should be routinely vaccinated with hepatitis A vaccine:*

- All children between their first and second birthdays (12 through 23 months of age).
- Anyone 1 year of age and older traveling to or working in countries with high or intermediate prevalence of hepatitis A, such as those located in Central or South America, Mexico, Asia (except Japan), Africa, and eastern Europe.
- Children and adolescents 2 through 18 years of age who live in states or communities where routine vaccination has been implemented because of high disease incidence.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People who use street drugs.
- People with chronic liver disease.
- People who are treated with clotting factor concentrates.
- People who work with HAV-infected primates or who work with HAV in research laboratories.
- Members of households planning to adopt a child, or care for a newly arriving adopted child, from a country where hepatitis A is common.
  
- Unvaccinated children or adolescents in communities where outbreaks of hepatitis A are occurring.
- Unvaccinated people who have been exposed to hepatitis A virus.
- Anyone 1 year of age or older who wants protection from hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A vaccine is not licensed for children younger than 1 year of age.

## **WHEN**

**For children**, the first dose should be given at 12 through 23 months of age. Children who are not vaccinated by 2 years of age can be vaccinated at later visits.

**For others at risk**, the hepatitis A vaccine series may be started whenever a person wishes to be protected or is at risk of infection.

**For travelers**, it is best to start the vaccine series at least one month before traveling. (Some protection may still result if the vaccine is given on or closer to the travel date.)

Two doses of the vaccine are needed for lasting protection. These doses should be given at least 6 months apart.

### **3. Some people should not get hepatitis A vaccine or should wait.**

- Anyone who has ever had a severe (life threatening) allergic reaction to a previous dose of hepatitis A vaccine should not get another dose.
- Anyone who has a severe (life threatening) allergy to any vaccine component should not get the vaccine.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant. Because hepatitis A vaccine is inactivated (killed), the risk to a pregnant woman or her unborn baby is believed to be very low. But your doctor can weigh any theoretical risk from the vaccine against the need for protection.

### **4. What are the risks from hepatitis A vaccine?**

A vaccine, like any medicine, could possibly cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of hepatitis A vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.

Getting hepatitis A vaccine is much safer than getting the disease.

#### **Mild problems**

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

If these problems occur, they usually last 1 or 2 days.

#### **Severe problems**

- serious allergic reaction, within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot (*very rare*).

### **5. What if there is a serious reaction?**

**What should I look for?**

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

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