

HEPATITIS A

Vaccine Fact Sheet

(AVAXIM[®], HAVRIX[®] AND VAQTA[®] Vaccine)

WHAT IS HEPATITIS A AND HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes inflammation and swelling of the liver. Symptoms can include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and jaundice (yellow skin and eyes). Some people may have no symptoms but can still spread the virus. Infants and children are more likely to be without symptoms than adults.

The virus spreads through the fecal-oral route by:

- Touching an infected person's stool. For example, changing an infected baby's diaper and then eating or drinking without washing your hands
- Eating food made by someone who did not wash hands properly after touching infected stool
- Eating raw or undercooked shellfish from contaminated waters or produce such as lettuce and strawberries
- Drinking water or drinks with ice cubes that are contaminated by infected stool. This is more common in countries with poor sanitation
- Having oral-anal sexual contact with an infected person

HOW CAN HEPATITIS A BE PREVENTED?

Hepatitis A is one of the most common vaccine-preventable illnesses in travellers. The best way to prevent hepatitis A is to get vaccinated in advance. The vaccine is safe and highly effective. It's also possible to prevent illness if you get vaccinated within two weeks of being exposed to the virus.

Two doses given 6 months apart are 90-97% effective and provides protection for over 20 years in healthy individuals. There is also a combined Hepatitis A and B vaccine for people who need protection against both viruses.

The hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for:

- Travelers to countries where Hepatitis A is common
- Children six months and older
- People with chronic liver disease or weakened immune systems
- Men who have sex with men
- People who use drugs

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675
TTY: Dial 711
york.ca/immunizations



Immune globulin (Ig) can also provide protection against Hepatitis A infection and may be recommended instead of the vaccine for the following groups:

- Infants less than six months of age
- People with weakened immune systems – may need the vaccine in addition for best protection
- People who cannot get the vaccine due to a history of a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the Hepatitis A vaccine or to any ingredient in the vaccine

The effectiveness of Ig depends on when you get it and how much you receive. Getting Ig right before you travel provides the best protection because it ensures your body has enough antibodies during your trip.

Other prevention tips:

- Wash your hands well with soap and warm water before eating or preparing food, and after using the bathroom or changing diapers
- When traveling:
 - Drink bottled or boiled water
 - Avoid ice cubes in drinks
 - Avoid raw shellfish
 - Eat food that is cooked well and peel raw fruits and vegetables yourself
- Practice safer sex and never share needles or drug equipment

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF THIS VACCINE OR IG?

Side effects for the vaccine and/or Ig tend to be mild and will go away in a few days. Severe side effects are rare.

- **Vaccine:**
 - Redness, swelling or soreness at the injection site are the most common
 - Slight fever, headache, weakness, muscle or joint pain
- **Ig:**
 - Redness (or purple on darker skin), soreness and stiffness at the injection site
 - Feeling unwell
 - Fever

WHO SHOULD NOT HAVE THIS VACCINE?

- People who previously experienced a severe reaction to the hepatitis A vaccine or are allergic to any ingredient(s) used in the vaccine
- Anyone with an allergy to neomycin or latex
- Infants less than six months of age

WHO SHOULD CONSULT THEIR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER?

People with complicated medical issues or previous severe reactions to vaccines should consult their health care provider before getting the vaccine or Ig.