

# Hepatitis A and the Vaccine (Shot) to Prevent It

Last updated February 2014

**The best way to protect against hepatitis A is by getting the hepatitis A vaccine. Doctors recommend that all children get the vaccine.**

## Why should my child get the hepatitis A shot?

The hepatitis A shot:

- Protects your child against hepatitis A, a potentially serious disease
- Protects other people from the disease because children with hepatitis A often don't have symptoms, but they often pass the disease to others, including their unvaccinated parents or caregivers, without anyone knowing they were infected
- Prevents your child from getting sick from hepatitis A as he or she gets older, when the disease is more serious
- Keeps your child from missing school or childcare (and keeps you from missing work to care for your sick child or if you become sick with hepatitis A infection)

## Is the hepatitis A shot safe?

The hepatitis A vaccine is very safe, and it is effective at preventing the hepatitis A disease. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. About half of the people who get the hepatitis A vaccine have no side effects at all. In the other half of people, most report having very mild side effects, like a sore arm from the shot for a day or two.

## What are the side effects?

The most common side effects are usually mild and last 1 or 2 days. They include the following:

- Sore arm from the shot
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Fever
- Loss of appetite (not wanting to eat)

## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. Children with the virus often don't have symptoms, but they often pass the disease to others, including their unvaccinated parents or caregivers. These individuals can get very sick.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Children under 6 years old often have no symptoms.

Older children and adults feel very sick and weak.

Symptoms usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after a person gets the virus. The symptoms may include the following:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite (not wanting to eat)
- Tiredness
- Stomach pain
- Vomiting
- Dark urine
- Yellow skin and eyes



Doctors recommend that your child get 2 doses of the hepatitis A shot for best protection. He or she should get the first dose at 12 through 23 months. He or she will need the second dose 6 to 18 months after the first.



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### **Is it serious?**

Most people with hepatitis A feel very sick for about 2 months. Some people are sick for up to 6 months. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Some people with hepatitis A get so sick that they need care in the hospital. About 100 people in the U.S. die each year from liver failure caused by hepatitis A.

### **How does hepatitis A spread?**

Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of a person who has the virus. It spreads when a person puts something in his or her mouth that has the hepatitis A virus on it. Even if the item looks clean, it can still have virus from stool on it that can spread to others. The amount of virus can be so tiny that it cannot be seen with the naked eye. You can get it by touching objects such as doorknobs or diapers or eating food that has the virus on it.

### **Where can I learn more about the hepatitis A vaccine and my child?**

To learn more about the hepatitis A vaccine, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.

# Hepatitis A (infectious hepatitis)

- [Hepatitis A: General Information \(PDF, 530 KB, 2pg.\)](#)

## What is hepatitis?

"Hepatitis" means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected.

Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. Heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions can also cause hepatitis.

## What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis A virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months.

## How common is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A still occurs in the United States, although not as frequently as it once did. Over the last 20 years, there has been more than a 90% decrease in Hepatitis A cases. New cases are now estimated to be around 20,000 each year. Many experts believe this decline is a result of the vaccination of children and people at risk for Hepatitis A.

## How is Hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is usually spread when a person ingests fecal matter - even in microscopic amounts - from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by feces or stool from an infected person.

Hepatitis A can be spread when:

- An infected person does not wash his or her hands properly after going to the bathroom and then touches objects or food
- A caregiver does not properly wash his or her hands after changing diapers or cleaning up the stool of an infected person
- Someone engages in certain sexual activities, such as oral-anal contact with an infected person

Hepatitis A also can be spread through contaminated food or water. This most often occurs in countries where Hepatitis A is common, especially if personal hygiene or sanitary conditions are poor. Contamination of food can happen at any point: growing, harvesting, processing, handling, and even after cooking.

## Who is at risk?

Although anyone can get Hepatitis A, some people are at greater risk, such as those who:

- Travel to or live in countries where Hepatitis A is common
- Have sexual contact with someone who has Hepatitis A
- Are men who have sexual encounters with other men
- Use recreational drugs, whether injected or not
- Have clotting-factor disorders, such as hemophilia
- Are household members or caregivers of a person infected with Hepatitis A

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Not everyone has symptoms. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after exposure and can include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Grey-colored stools
- Dark urine
- Joint pain
- Jaundice

Symptoms are more likely to occur in adults than in children. They usually last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill for as long as 6 months.

### How is Hepatitis A diagnosed and treated?

A doctor can determine if a person has Hepatitis A by discussing his or her symptoms and taking a blood sample. To treat Hepatitis A, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and medical monitoring. Some people will need to be hospitalized. It can take a few months before people begin to feel better.

### How serious is Hepatitis A?

Most people who get Hepatitis A feel sick for several months, but they usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage. Sometimes Hepatitis A can cause liver failure and death, although this is rare and occurs more commonly in people older than 50 and people with other liver diseases.

### How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent Hepatitis A is by getting vaccinated. Experts recommend the vaccine for all children, some international travelers, and people with certain risk factors and medical conditions. The Hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective and given as 2 shots, 6 months apart. Both shots are needed for long-term protection.

Frequent handwashing with soap and water - particularly after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing or eating food - also helps prevent the spread of Hepatitis A.

### Who should get vaccinated against Hepatitis A?

Vaccination is recommended for certain groups, including:

- Men who have sexual encounters with other men
- Users of recreational drugs, whether injected or not
- People with chronic or long-term liver disease, including Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C
- Travelers to countries where Hepatitis A is common
- People with clotting-factor disorders
- Family and caregivers of adoptees from countries where Hepatitis A is common
- All children at age 1 year

# Hepatitis B and the Vaccine (Shot) to Prevent It

Last updated February 2014

**The best way to protect against hepatitis B is by getting the hepatitis B vaccine. Doctors recommend that all children get the vaccine.**

## Why should my child get the hepatitis B shot?

The hepatitis B shot:

- Protects your child against hepatitis B, a potentially serious disease
- Protects other people from the disease because children with hepatitis B usually don't have symptoms, but they often pass the disease to others without anyone knowing they were infected
- Prevents your child from developing liver disease and cancer from hepatitis B
- Keeps your child from missing school or childcare (and keeps you from missing work to care for your sick child)

## Is the hepatitis B shot safe?

The hepatitis B vaccine is very safe, and it is effective at preventing hepatitis B. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. No serious side effects are known to be caused by the hepatitis B vaccine.

## What are the side effects?

Most people who get the hepatitis B vaccine will have no side effects at all. When side effects do occur, they are very mild, such as a low fever (less than 101 degrees) or a sore arm from the shot.

## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. When a person is first infected with the virus, he or she can develop an "acute" (short-term) infection. Acute hepatitis B refers to the first 6 months after someone is infected with the hepatitis B virus. This infection can range from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. Some people are able to fight the infection and clear the virus.

For others, the infection remains and is "chronic," or lifelong. Chronic hepatitis B refers to the infection when it remains active instead of getting better after 6 months. Over time, the infection can cause serious health problems, and even liver cancer.



Doctors recommend that your child get 3 doses of the hepatitis B shot for best protection. Ask your doctor when your child should get the next shot. Typically, children get one dose at each of the following ages:

- Birth
- 1 to 2 months
- 6 months



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## What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Infants and young children usually show no symptoms. But, in about 7 out of 10 older children and adults, recent hepatitis B infection causes the following:

- Loss of appetite (not wanting to eat)
- Fever
- Tiredness
- Pain in muscles, joints, and stomach
- Nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting
- Dark urine
- Yellow skin and eyes

These symptoms usually appear 3 or 4 months after being exposed to the virus.

## Is it serious?

Hepatitis B can be very serious. Most people with recent hepatitis B may feel sick for a few weeks to several months. In some people, the infection goes away on its own (i.e., resolves without treatment). For other people, the virus infection remains active in their bodies for the rest of their life.

Although people with lifelong hepatitis B usually don't have symptoms, the virus causes liver damage over time and could lead to liver cancer. For these people, there is no cure, but treatment can help prevent serious problems.

## How does hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B virus spreads through blood or other body fluids that contain small amounts of blood from an infected person. People can spread the virus even when they have no symptoms.

Babies and children can get hepatitis B in the following ways:

- At birth from their infected mother
- Being bitten by an infected person
- By touching open cuts or sores of an infected person
- Through sharing toothbrushes or other personal items used by an infected person
- From food that was chewed (for a baby) by an infected person

The virus can live on objects for 7 days or more. Even if you don't see any blood, there could be virus on an object.

## Where can I learn more about the hepatitis B vaccine and my child?

To learn more about the hepatitis B vaccine, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents).

### The Hepatitis B Vaccine Dose at Birth

It's hard to imagine putting your newborn through the pain of a shot. But a little stick early in life is an important first step to protecting your baby against a deadly disease.

All babies should get the first shot of hepatitis B vaccine before they leave the hospital. This shot acts as a safety net, reducing the risk of getting the disease from moms or family members who may not know they are infected with hepatitis B.

When a mom has hepatitis B, there's an additional medicine that can help protect the baby against hepatitis B, called the hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG). HBIG gives a baby's body a "boost" or extra help to fight the virus as soon as he is born. This shot works best when the baby gets it within the first 12 hours of his life. The baby will also need to complete the full hepatitis B vaccination series for best protection.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.

# Hepatitis B (serum hepatitis)

## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). The virus can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure and death.

## Who gets hepatitis B?

One out of 20 people in the United States will get infected with HBV some time during their lives. Anyone can get hepatitis B, but you are at greater risk if you:

- have sex with someone infected with HBV
- have multiple sex partners
- are a man and have sex with men
- have ever been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease
- are an injection drug user
- live in the same house with someone who has lifelong (chronic) HBV infection
- are a health care or public safety worker who has contact with human blood
- are an infant born to an HBV-infected mother
- are a hemodialysis patient
- are an infant/child or immigrant from areas with high rates of infection

## How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis B virus can be found in the blood and, to a lesser extent, saliva, semen and other body fluids of an infected person. It is spread by direct contact with infected body fluids; usually by needle stick injury or sexual contact. Hepatitis B virus is not spread by casual contact.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

The symptoms of hepatitis B include fatigue, poor appetite, stomach pain, fever, nausea, vomiting and occasionally joint pain, hives or rash. Urine may become darker in color, and then jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes) may appear. Adults are more likely than children to develop symptoms; however, up to 50 percent of adults who have acute infection do not have any symptoms.

## How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear six weeks to six months after exposure, but usually within four months.

## For how long is a person able to spread the virus?

The virus can be found in blood and other body fluids several weeks before symptoms appear and generally persists for several months afterward. Approximately 10 percent of infected adults may become long-term (chronic) carriers of the virus. Infants infected at birth have a 90 percent chance of becoming chronically infected.

## What is the treatment for hepatitis B?

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person that is acutely infected once the symptoms appear. Generally, bed rest is all that is needed. Interferon is the most effective treatment for chronic HBV infection and is successful in 25 to 50 percent of cases. Chronic carriers of HBV should avoid drinking alcohol or taking medications which are harmful to the liver, as these actions can make the liver disease worse.

### What precautions should hepatitis B carriers take?

Chronic hepatitis B carriers should follow standard hygienic practices to ensure that close contacts are not directly contaminated by his or her blood or other body fluids. Carriers must not share razors, toothbrushes or any other object that may become contaminated with blood. In addition, susceptible household members, particularly sexual partners, should be immunized with hepatitis B vaccine. It is important for carriers to inform their dentist and health care providers.

### How can hepatitis B be prevented?

A safe and effective vaccine to prevent hepatitis B is available. The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for people in high-risk settings who have not already been infected and for infants who are born to infected mothers. It is recommended that all children and adolescents be vaccinated against hepatitis B along with their routine childhood immunizations beginning at birth. A special hepatitis B immune globulin is also available for people who are exposed to the virus. In the event of exposure to hepatitis B, consult a doctor or the local health department.



# Hepatitis C

## What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of persons who have this disease. HCV is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person.

## Who gets hepatitis C?

Persons at highest risk for HCV infection include:

- persons who ever injected illegal drugs, including those who injected once or a few times many years ago,
- people who had blood transfusions, blood products or organ donations before June 1992, when sensitive tests for HCV were introduced for blood screening, and
- persons who received clotting factors made before 1987.

Other persons at risk for hepatitis C include:

- long-term kidney dialysis patients,
- health care workers after exposures (i.e., needle stick or splashes to the eye) to the blood of an infected person while on the job,
- infants born to HCV-infected mothers,
- people with high-risk sexual behavior, multiple partners and sexually transmitted diseases,
- people who snort cocaine using shared equipment, and
- people who have shared toothbrushes, razors and other personal items with a family member who is HCV-infected.

## How is the virus spread?

Like hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus is spread when blood of an infected person enters the body of a person who is not infected, such as through sharing needles or "works" when shooting drugs or occupational needle stick injury. The risk of sexual transmission has not been thoroughly studied but appears to be low in long-term, monogamous relationships. There is no evidence that the hepatitis C virus can be transmitted by casual contact such as hugging or shaking hands, through foods, by sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses, or by coughing or sneezing. Hepatitis C is not spread by breastmilk.

## How soon do symptoms occur after exposure to the virus? How long are they infectious?

Approximately 20 percent of persons exposed to the virus develop symptoms which may include jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes), fatigue, dark-colored urine, stomach pain, loss of appetite and nausea. After the initial infection, 15-25 percent will recover and 75-85 percent will become chronically infected (life-long infection). Approximately 70 percent of persons chronically infected may develop liver disease, sometimes decades after initial infection.

## How soon do symptoms occur?

Symptoms may occur from two weeks to six months after exposure but usually within six to nine weeks.

## When and for how long is a person able to spread hepatitis C?

Persons with acute hepatitis C virus infection are generally contagious from one or more weeks before the onset of symptoms. The contagious period is indefinite in chronically infected persons. All persons who test positive should be considered to be potentially contagious.

### What is the treatment for hepatitis C?

Drugs (anti-viral) are licensed for treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis C. Combination drug therapy, using pegylated interferon and ribavirin, can get rid of the virus in up to five out of ten of persons with genotype 1, the most common genotype in the U.S. and eight out of ten persons with genotype 2 or 3. It is important to know that not everyone will need treatment. The decision to treat hepatitis C is complex and is best made by a physician experienced in treating the disease.

### Is donated blood tested for this virus?

Since the early 1990s, blood donation centers throughout the U.S. have routinely used a blood donor screening test for hepatitis C. Widespread use of this test has significantly reduced the number of post-transfusion hepatitis C infections.

### How can the risk of chronic liver disease be reduced among persons infected with hepatitis C?

People who are infected with hepatitis C should not drink alcohol. They should talk with their doctor before taking any new medications, including over-the-counter and herbal medications. They should also talk with their doctor about getting the hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines.

### How can the spread of hepatitis C be prevented?

People who have had hepatitis C should remain aware that their blood is potentially infectious.

- Do not shoot drugs; if you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program; if you can't stop, never share needles, syringes, water or "works", and get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- If you are a health care or public safety worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps; get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- HCV can be spread by sex, but this is rare. If you are having sex with more than one steady sex partner, use latex condoms correctly and every time to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. You should also get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- If you are infected with HCV, do not donate blood, organs or tissue.

### Is there a vaccine for hepatitis C?

At present time, a hepatitis C vaccine is not available.