



Frequently Asked Questions about

The Hepatitis A Vaccine

If the hepatitis A virus exists in the stool of infected people and is most commonly transmitted through contact with stool, why should people who are careful to be clean worry about it?

- Cleanliness—such as washing hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers—is an important prevention measure, especially for people who handle food or work in daycare settings. However, infected people are most likely to transmit the illness to others one to two weeks before they even start to feel sick. Not surprisingly, about half of the people who are infected do not know where they got the disease.¹
- Hepatitis A infection rates are higher in some geographic areas than in others, although the reasons for these differences are not fully understood. For example, in the western United States and among Native American and Alaskan Native populations, the rates of hepatitis A infection are higher than in other parts of the country. Some groups of people are at increased risk of infection and should be protected by the vaccine including international travelers, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, laboratory workers who may come in contact with the virus, and people with hemophilia or clotting-factor disorders who receive blood products. People who have chronic liver disease are not more likely to catch the hepatitis A virus, but they are at increased risk for death or serious complications so they particularly need protection.^{1,2}
- For children, routine hepatitis A vaccination is only recommended for those who live in communities that have high rates of hepatitis A infections. Your local or state health department will be able to tell you if hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for every child in your area. In the case of an outbreak in an area with intermediate levels of hepatitis A infection, the vaccine may also be recommended for children to protect them and prevent the disease from spreading further. The hepatitis A vaccine is not licensed for use among children younger than two years of age.²

How long has the hepatitis A vaccine been in use?

- The first vaccine was licensed in 1995. From 1995 through December 1998, more than 6.5 million doses were administered in the United States. Of those, more than two million were children. In 1999, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended routine vaccination of children two years of age and older in states, counties, and communities where the average annual hepatitis A rate is relatively high.¹

Sources:

¹ Atkinson W, Wolfe C, Humiston S, Nelson R, eds. *Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases*. 6th ed. (The Pink Book.) Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2000. pp.193-206.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention of hepatitis A through active or passive immunization: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). *MMWR Morbid Mortal Wkly Rep* 1997; 45:1-30.