

Hepatitis A: Brief Summary

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the hepatitis A virus (HAV). It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months. Hepatitis A is usually spread when a person ingests fecal matter—even in microscopic amounts—from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the feces, or stool, of an infected person

Who is at risk for Hepatitis A?

Although anyone can get hepatitis A in the United States, certain groups of people are at higher risk, such as those who:

- Travel to or live in countries where hepatitis A is common
- Are men who have sex with men
- Use illegal drugs, whether injected or not
- Have clotting-factor disorders, such as hemophilia
- Live with someone who has hepatitis A
- Have oral-anal sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis A

Once you recover from hepatitis A, you develop antibodies that protect you from the virus for life. An antibody is a substance found in the blood that the body produces in response to a virus. Antibodies protect the body from disease by attaching to the virus and destroying it.

Hepatitis A Vaccine

The hepatitis A vaccine is highly effective in preventing hepatitis A virus infection. Protection begins approximately two to four weeks after the first injection. A second injection, given six months later, results in long-term protection. The vaccine also comes in a combination form, containing both hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine, that can be given to persons 18 years of age and older. This form is given as three shots, over a period of six months.

No serious side effects have resulted from the hepatitis A vaccine. Soreness at the injection site is the most common side effect reported. As with any medicine, there are very small risks that a serious problem could occur after someone gets the vaccine. However, the potential risks associated with hepatitis A are much greater than the potential risks associated with the hepatitis A vaccine. Before the vaccine became available in the United States, more than 250,000 people were infected with the virus each year. Since the licensure of the first hepatitis A vaccine in 1995, millions of doses of hepatitis A vaccine have been given in the United States and worldwide.

For more information about hepatitis A, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis