

Hepatitis A Vaccine

Keep your child and yourself safe. By getting all vaccines on time, you and your child can be protected from many preventable diseases over your lifetimes. Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is hepatitis A and how is it spread?

- Hepatitis A is a virus that infects the liver. For every 1,000 people infected, 1 to 3 could die. This rate is higher in people 50 years of age and older.
- The hepatitis A virus is found in the bowel movements (stool) of infected persons. People with hepatitis A infection who do not wash their hands well can pass the virus on to others through food preparation or other hand-to-mouth contact.
- Hepatitis A can also be spread by drinking contaminated water, or by eating under-cooked or raw shellfish such as crabs, clams, oysters or mussels that have been contaminated with sewage.
- The disease can also be spread by sexual contact, or through sharing of equipment used for drug use such as needles or pipes.
- There is no known cure or specific treatment for hepatitis A infection.
- Persons who have had hepatitis A cannot get it again.
- People who eat or drink with, or use the same bathrooms as an infected person, are at risk of becoming infected themselves.

What are symptoms of a hepatitis A infection?

- Symptoms usually last from 1-2 weeks, but may last for months and include:
 - Fatigue, fever, loss of appetite and nausea.
 - Jaundice (yellow colouring of the skin and whites of the eyes).
 - Dark-colour urine and light colour stools.
- Many infected persons may not develop any symptoms.
- The time between becoming infected and developing symptoms is about 1 month.
- Infected persons can pass the virus to others up to 2 weeks before they start developing symptoms and for 1 week after developing jaundice.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

- Be immunized. The vaccine is the best way to protect against hepatitis A infection and its complications.
- When you get immunized, you help protect others as well.
- Practice good hygiene (e.g. handwashing).

Who can get the vaccine for free in Saskatchewan?

- Children aged 1-15 years living in northern health regions or on reserves in Saskatchewan (excluded: Creighton, Air Ronge and La Ronge).
- Men who have sex with men.
- Individuals that use or share illicit drug snorting, smoking or injection equipment.
- Sexual partners and household contacts of individuals who use illicit drugs.
- All case contacts 12 months and older who are identified within 2 weeks of exposure to an infectious HA case.
- Non-immune individuals with bleeding disorders and others who receive repeated infusions of blood or blood products or plasma-derived replacement clotting factors.
- Individuals who have chronic liver disease (including alcoholism, hepatitis C, hepatitis B, cirrhosis) who are non-immune to HA.
- Liver transplant candidates or recipients.
- Haematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT) recipients.

Who should not get the vaccine?

A mild illness, with or without fever, is not a reason to avoid immunizations.

- Persons who have a serious illness, with or without a fever, should delay immunization.

- Persons who have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of a vaccine containing hepatitis A, or who have severe allergies to any of the vaccine components.
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should inform their nurse or doctor before receiving the vaccine.

What are possible reactions to the vaccine?

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get hepatitis A.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include:

- Soreness, redness and swelling at the injection site.
- Headache, fatigue, fever, and stomach upset may also occur after getting the vaccine.
- These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in one million people who get the vaccine.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (Aspirin®) should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye's syndrome.

Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor or nurse practitioner as soon as possible.

Talk to your public health nurse if:

- You have questions or concerns about your or your child's reaction to an immunization; or
- You had to take your child to a doctor, hospital or health centre with an illness that might be related to immunization.

What does the vaccine contain?

- Avaxim contains inactivated Hepatitis A Virus (GBM strain), 2-phenoxyethanol, formaldehyde, aluminum hydroxide (expressed as aluminum), Medium 199 Hanks in water for injection, polysorbate 80, neomycin is present in trace amounts. The plunger stoppers and needle shield for the syringes do not contain latex (natural rubber).
- HAVRIX® contains formaldehyde-inactivated hepatitis A virus, aluminum hydroxide, amino acids for injection, disodium phosphate, monopotassium phosphate, neomycin sulphate, polysorbate 20, potassium chloride, sodium chloride and water for injection. May contain traces of bovine serum albumin. Thimerosal-free. The manufacturer cannot guarantee that the vial stopper or rubber syringe stopper does not contain latex.
- VAQTA® contains inactivated hepatitis A virus, aluminum (as amorphous aluminum hydroxyphosphate sulfate), sodium borate, sodium chloride, water for injection. May contain traces of formaldehyde, bovine serum albumin or neomycin. Thimerosal-free. Latex is present in the vial stopper.

Your immunization information will be recorded in a computerized system known as the Saskatchewan Immunization Management System (SIMS). Information collected in SIMS may be used to:

- *Manage immunization records;*
- *Notify you if you or your child needs an immunization; and*
- *Monitor how well vaccines work in preventing vaccine preventable diseases.*

Your immunization records may also be shared with health care professionals in order to provide public health services; assist with diagnosis and treatment; and to control the spread of vaccine preventable diseases.

For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner or HealthLine at 811.

References: Product monographs (Avaxim 2011; Havrix 2011; Vaqta 2013).