



CALHOUN COUNTY

Public Health Department

190 E Michigan Ave
Battle Creek, MI 49014

calhouncountymi.gov/publichealth
269-969-6370

Fact Sheet

Hepatitis A and Immune Globulin

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable liver infection caused by the Hepatitis A Virus. Hepatitis A can cause damage to the liver and create other health problems. Hepatitis A appears only as an acute infection and does not become chronic.

In 2021, 5,728 hepatitis A cases were reported in the United States. However, the actual number of cases is predicted to be much higher because many people do not get diagnosed. Since the introduction of the vaccine, cases of hepatitis A have dramatically declined.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is very contagious. The virus is spread through the fecal-oral route, meaning you must get something in your mouth that is contaminated with feces from an infected person. Hepatitis A can also spread from close personal contact with an infected person, such as sex or caring for someone who is ill.

Outbreaks may be due to water or food being contaminated with feces during growing, harvesting, processing, handling, or consuming contaminated food or water. The virus can survive of the body for months but heating foods and liquids to temperatures of 185 degrees Fahrenheit for at least one minute can kill the virus. Although rare, some outbreaks have occurred through contaminated fresh and frozen imported food products.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Adults are more likely to show symptoms of hepatitis A than children. Symptoms will appear between 2 to 7 weeks after initial infection and last less

than 2 months. A person can transmit the virus to others up to 2 weeks prior to the onset of symptoms.

Common symptoms include:

- Yellow skin or eyes
- Not wanting to eat
- Upset stomach
- Throwing up
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Dark urine or light-colored stools
- Diarrhea
- Joint pain
- Feeling tired

What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

If you think that you have been exposed to hepatitis A, call your doctor immediately. A single shot of the hepatitis A vaccine can help prevent hepatitis A if given within 2 weeks of exposure. Depending upon your age and health, your doctor may recommend immune globulin in addition to the hepatitis A vaccine.

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A infection. Infected people should get lots of bed rest, eat a balanced diet, drink fluids, avoid alcohol, and frequently wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water.

Infected people should not share towels, washcloths, soap, or eating utensils, or make or handle food that will be eaten by others until at least two weeks after their jaundice appears or symptoms are gone. If you are a food-service worker, a health care worker, or a daycare worker, report your illness to your employer and do not work until your illness is over and your medical provider says it is safe to return to work.

Are there complications from hepatitis A?

As a general rule, hepatitis A infection has a very low death rate with most cases resulting in complete recovery.

Death or serious illness may result when a person is also infected with hepatitis B or C, already has other liver diseases, or is older than 50 years of age.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is through vaccination with the hepatitis A vaccine. To get the full benefit of the hepatitis A vaccine, more than one shot is needed. The number and timing of these shots depends on the type of vaccine you are given.

The following people should be vaccinated against hepatitis A:

- All children aged 12 months through 18 years of age
- People at increased risk for hepatitis A: international travelers, men who have sex with men, people who use or inject drugs, people with occupational risk for exposure, people who anticipate close personal contact with an international adoptee, people experiencing homelessness.
- People at increased risk for severe disease from hepatitis A infection: people with chronic liver disease, including hepatitis B and hepatitis C; people with HIV.

For those people traveling to intermediate or high-risk areas of the world, vaccination is recommended. The vaccine series should be started at least 1 month prior to travel to provide the best protection. Persons who get the vaccine less than 1 month before traveling can also get immune globulin which gives immediate, temporary protection.

Travelers should minimize their exposure to hepatitis A by avoiding contaminated water or food, uncooked shellfish, and fruits or vegetables which are not peeled or cooked.

Good sanitation and good hygiene are the keys to preventing hepatitis A. Specifically, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

- Before eating or preparing food
- After using the bathroom
- After diapering/toileting a small child.

What is immune globulin?

Immune globulin, also known as gamma globulin, is a sterile solution of concentrated antibodies made from pooled human plasma that protects against infection. When administered within 2 weeks of exposure, immune globulin is 80%–90% effective at preventing hepatitis A.

This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

Immune globulin is safe. No transmission of hepatitis B virus, HIV, hepatitis C virus, or other viruses has been reported from the intramuscular administration of immune globulin. Immune globulin can be administered during pregnancy and breast feeding.

Immune globulin provides protection for about 2 months against hepatitis A. Long-term or frequent travelers should consider the hepatitis A vaccine, which provides long-term protection against hepatitis A.

What are the possible side effects of immune globulin?

Side effects from immune globulin are few – primarily pain and tenderness at the injection site. Fever is also possible. Very rarely some people can suffer from a severe allergic reaction.

Are there any precautions associated with immune globulin?

The following people should consult their physician before receiving immune globulin:

- Those with isolated immunoglobulin (IgA) deficiency
- Those with severe thrombocytopenia (a decreased number of platelets in the blood) or bleeding disorders that would advise against intramuscular injections.

Vaccinations for measles, mumps, and rubella or varicella should be not given less than six months after immune globulin. Yellow fever vaccine, rotavirus vaccine, oral typhoid vaccine, live attenuated influenza vaccine can be administered at any time before or after or simultaneously with an antibody-containing product.

How do I get more information on hepatitis A and immune globulin?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383

 www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/

Spanish: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/pdfs/HepAGeneralFactsheet_spa.pdf