

Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B 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.

What is hepatitis B and how is it spread?

- Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver and can cause permanent scarring (cirrhosis), liver cancer and death.
- The virus is found in the body fluids (including blood, semen, vaginal fluids and saliva) of infected persons.
- In Canada, most cases occur in unimmunized persons 25 years of age and older.
- Some infected persons have the virus in their blood and body fluids. They are called 'chronic carriers' and are infectious for life. Infants, young children and immune compromised people have the highest risk of becoming chronic carriers.

The hepatitis B virus is spread:

- By being poked with an infected needle.
- By sharing razors, toothbrushes and dental floss with an infected person.
- By reusing dirty and/or sharing equipment for tattooing, piercings, acupuncture or needles used to inject drugs or other substances (like steroids).
- Through unprotected sexual activity.
- From an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy.

What are symptoms of a hepatitis B infection?

- About 50% of adults and 90% of children who are infected with hepatitis B do not develop any symptoms but are infectious to others.
- It usually takes 4 months to develop symptoms.
- Symptoms include: loss of appetite, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and jaundice.
- Hepatitis B illness lasts about 3 months.
- Up to 2 out of 100 infected people will die.
- Up to 10 out of 100 infected people will develop chronic liver disease.

How can hepatitis A and hepatitis B be prevented?

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

Who can get the vaccine free of charge in Saskatchewan?

- Individuals with chronic liver disease (including cirrhosis, hepatitis C infection).
- Individuals with bleeding disorders, including those who receive repeated infusions of blood or blood products or plasma-derived replacement clotting factors.
- Liver transplant candidates or recipients.
- Stem cell transplant recipients.
- Those who use or share illicit drug snorting, smoking or injection equipment.
- Men who have sex with men.

Who should not receive 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 the vaccine, or who have severe allergies to any of the vaccine components.
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should be given the vaccine only if clearly necessary.

What are possible reactions to the vaccine?

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

- Very common reactions may include:
 - Headache and fatigue; irritability in children.
 - Pain, redness and swelling at the injection site.
- Common reactions include fever, nausea and vomiting. 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.

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 you or your child's reaction to an immunization.
- You or your child had to see a doctor, hospital or health centre with an illness that might be related to an immunization.

What does the vaccine contain?

- Twinrix® Adult and Twinrix® Jr. contain purified, inactivated hepatitis A virus and purified hepatitis B surface antigen, aluminum hydroxide, aluminum phosphate, sodium chloride and water for injection. Residues: amino acids for injection, formaldehyde, neomycin sulphate and polysorbate 20. May contain traces of yeast. Thimerosal and preservative free. Prefilled syringes have dry natural rubber stoppers. The manufacturers cannot guarantee that rubber stoppers and caps do not contain traces of latex.

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 please contact:

Your local public health office, your physician or nurse practitioner, or HealthLine at 1-877-800-0002.

References: Product Monograph (2012); Canadian Immunization Guide 8th Ed., 2012.

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.