



HEPATITIS A

WHAT IS HEPATITIS A?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver, and Hepatitis A (HAV) is a viral disease transmitted via the faecal-oral route that affects the liver. Infection with Hepatitis A provides life-long immunity; it is rarely fatal and does not cause chronic disease, unlike hepatitis B and C.

Typically, infection is passed on through eating food or drinking water contaminated by the faeces of an infected person. HAV can also be transmitted by eating raw vegetables grown in soil fertilised with infected faeces, drinking untreated water, illicit IV drug use and through some sexual activities (particularly oral-anal).

Some large-scale outbreaks have been caused by contaminated food (such as frozen berries, seafood, and fresh fruit and vegetables). The virus is relatively hardy and survives in the environment for months; it is resistant to freezing, but heating to 85°C for at least one minute will render it inactive.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The period between exposure and onset of symptoms for Hepatitis A virus is generally around 28 days (ranging from 15 to 50 days) with common symptoms including fever, loss of appetite, nausea and pain in the right upper abdomen, followed within several days by jaundice. This condition results in the yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes.

Symptoms may range from mild to severe, with some individuals displaying none. Children under 6 years of age are often asymptomatic (meaning they do not show any symptoms), but they can transmit the infection to others.

The infection can persist for anywhere from 1 to 2 months, and the severity varies from a mild illness to a severely disabling disease lasting several months. Approximately 10%-15% of infected people have prolonged or relapsing symptoms over a 6-to-9-month period. Severe complications, including fulminant Hepatitis and liver failure, are rare but more likely to occur in older adults and people with underlying liver disease.

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

HAV is common in areas with poor sanitation and restricted access to clean water. In countries with high HAV endemicity, as in some African and Asian countries, many adults are immune to HAV due to infection during childhood, and epidemics of Hepatitis A are uncommon.

In areas such as Central and South America, Eastern Europe and parts of Asia with intermediate HAV endemicity, childhood transmission is less common, so more adolescents and adults are vulnerable to infection. Outbreaks then become more likely.

In countries such as Australia, the United States and Western Europe, where there is low HAV endemicity, infection is less common in the general community. Still, the disease occurs among people in high-risk groups (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) as community-wide outbreaks.

RISK TO TRAVELLERS

All individuals travelling for any purpose, frequency, or duration to countries with high or intermediate HAV endemicity should be vaccinated before departure. Large outbreaks of Hepatitis A have been reported in developed countries among people who have been exposed to imported food contaminated with HAV, men having sex with men, drug users, and the homeless.

Considering the difficulty of interpreting Hepatitis A risk maps and the potential risk of food-borne Hepatitis A in countries with low endemicity, some travel health providers advise people travelling outside of Australia to consider Hepatitis A vaccination regardless of their destination.

The way to avoid acquiring Hepatitis A is to follow food and water precautions and maintain high standards of hygiene and sanitation.

HOW IS HEPATITIS A TREATED?

There is no cure for HAV, and the only recommendation is bed rest. The illness itself is not pleasant – especially if you travel in a foreign country - making prevention the best possible measure.

OUR RECOMMENDATION

To avoid the transmission of Hepatitis A, it is important to ensure proper hygiene, avoid sharing food, crockery, and utensils and always drink bottled or filtered water. While this is best practice for many diseases and should always be employed when in a developing country, the best way to ensure you do not contract HAV on your next trip is through vaccination.

WHAT IS HEPATITIS A VACCINATION?

Type: Injectable

Inactivated Hepatitis A vaccine is a safe and highly effective option.

- Inactivated virus vaccine
- Inactivated combination vaccine* with hepatitis B
- Inactivated combination vaccine with typhoid

Contraindications: Hepatitis A–containing vaccines should not be administered to travellers with a history of hypersensitivity to any vaccine component, including neomycin. The Inactivated combination vaccine* with hepatitis B should not be administered to people with a history of hypersensitivity to yeast.

The tip caps of prefilled syringes of certain inactivated virus vaccines, the vial stopper, the syringe plunger stopper, and the tip caps of certain inactivated virus vaccines may contain dry natural rubber, which may cause allergic reactions in latex-sensitive people.

SCHEDULE

- Inactivated monovalent vaccine: Single dose, followed by a booster at 6 to 12 months
- Hepatitis A and B combined vaccine: Three doses at 0, 1 and 6 months
- Hepatitis A and Typhoid combined vaccine: Single dose, followed by Hepatitis A booster at 6-36 months - licensed for people aged ≥16 years.

SCHEDULE (ACCELERATED)

*Accelerated schedules (for certain products) are available for adults as per the product information.

LEVEL OF PROTECTION

Randomised controlled trials show that the vaccines have protective efficacy of nearly 100%. The duration of immunity after vaccination is uncertain. However, vaccine-induced antibodies against HAV probably persist for many years. Booster doses are not required.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

The most commonly reported symptoms after Hepatitis A vaccine include mild injection site reactions of short duration, such as redness, swelling, a hard lump or bruising around the injection site (56%–67%) and headache (14%–16%).

As with all vaccines, there is a small risk of allergic reactions.

WHERE CAN I GET A HEPATITIS A VACCINATION FROM?

If you require vaccination against Hepatitis A, head to a Travelvax clinic [near you](#). Staffed by trained professionals with access to state-of-the-art equipment, we can help keep you safe on your next trip.

References:

Australian Immunisation Handbook <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccine-preventable-diseases/hepatitis-a>

US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/pdfs/HepAGeneralFactSheet.pdf>

FAQS

HOW LONG IS THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE GOOD FOR?

The duration of immunity after vaccination with 2 doses of an age appropriate monovalent vaccine is uncertain. It is expected that vaccine-induced antibodies against HAV persist for many years.

Currently, there are no recommendations for boosters once the course is completed in immuno-competent individuals.

SHOULD I GET THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE?

Getting a Hepatitis A vaccination offers high levels of protection against infection from the Hepatitis A virus, preventing illness that can be severe in some cases. Age indications for the different vaccines range from 12 months of age and above.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU NEED TO GET THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE?

The course of the monovalent Hepatitis A vaccine involves 2 doses. The first dose provides short- to medium-term protection, but a booster dose taken within 6-36 months of the first dose provides long-term protection, and in most cases, no further boosters are required. The combination of Hepatitis A and B vaccines has a different schedule and may require 3 or 4 doses.

IS THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE NECESSARY?

Hepatitis A vaccinations are not routinely recommended in Australia (with the exception of Indigenous children in some states and people with medical and lifestyle risk factors – see next 2 questions), and our rates of infection and hospitalisation are low. However, occasional outbreaks have been reported here, which are usually associated with a food source. Travel to countries or regions of intermediate to high Hepatitis A endemicity, i.e. parts of Africa, Asia, Central America and South America, is a recommendation for receiving the Hepatitis A vaccination.

IS THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE FREE?

The Hepatitis A vaccine is included in the routine immunisation schedule for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in WA, NT, SA, and Qld at 18 months of age and again at 4 years due to the increased risk for Hepatitis A in this population. Apart from this cohort, the Hepatitis A vaccine is not funded.

DO I NEED THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE?

Hepatitis A vaccines are recommended for specific members of the population who are considered at a higher risk of infection – they include Indigenous children, people with medical risk factors and those with developmental disabilities, people with occupational or lifestyle risks and also travellers to regions of intermediate or high Hepatitis A endemicity.

IS HEPATITIS A VACCINE SAFE TO TAKE IF I'M PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING?

Hepatitis A vaccines are not routinely recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women, but vaccination may be advised if at risk of infection. The decision on whether to proceed with Hepatitis A vaccination in these cases is made on a risk versus benefit basis in consultation with a medical practitioner.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE?

The course of Hepatitis A vaccinations is highly immunogenic and provides long-lasting protection in most cases. People who have had Hepatitis A infection are immune to further infection from the Hepatitis A virus.

HOW LONG BEFORE TRAVEL DO I NEED HEPATITIS A VACCINATION?

Before you travel outside of Australia, you should make an appointment to see your travel doctor or regular general practitioner for a Hepatitis A vaccination program 4 to 6 weeks before you set off on your trip.

It's essential that you don't leave your travel vaccinations to the last minute because some may require more than one dose pre-travel to provide protection against infection.

WHO SHOULD GET HEPATITIS A VACCINE?

Two doses of the Hepatitis A vaccine are necessary, six to 36 months apart, for people belonging to the following categories:

- Anyone who lives, works or cares for children in rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in South and Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.
- Early childhood educators.
- People who care for people with developmental disabilities.
- Plumbers and sewage workers.
- Anyone aged ≥1 year who travels to moderately to highly endemic areas for Hepatitis A.
- Anyone who injects drugs.
- Any who is an inmate of a correctional facility.
- Anyone who has anal sex.
- Anyone with liver disease long-term.
- Anyone who has had a liver transplant.
- Anyone who lives with hepatitis B or C.

HOW IS HEPATITIS A VACCINE ADMINISTERED?

The Hepatitis A vaccine administration route is via an injection into the upper arm muscle. The monovalent vaccine is given in two separate jabs of 0.5 ml for children and 1 ml for adults 6 to 12 months apart. The Hepatitis A vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines. There are also Hepatitis A-containing vaccines that are in combination with the typhoid fever antigen or with Hepatitis B. Ask your doctor which vaccine of the many available is right for you.

CAN YOU GET HEPATITIS A AFTER VACCINATION?

No, you cannot contract Hepatitis A after you have been vaccinated against the disease (with 2 doses of a monovalent

vaccine). But be aware that the Hepatitis A vaccine only protects against Hepatitis A. There is another vaccine available for Hepatitis B and a combination of Hepatitis A and B vaccines offering protection against both viruses.

~~IS THERE A VACCINE TO PREVENT HEPATITIS C?~~

No, there is no vaccination against Hepatitis C. Preventative measures include avoiding exposure to blood that could contain the Hepatitis C virus. The best way to avoid Hepatitis C is as follows:

- Do not share needles, syringes and other injection equipment.
- Make sure the equipment used for tattooing, acupuncture, and body piercing is sterile.
- If you need surgical, podiatry, or dental treatment, ensure the practitioner is registered under the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency or its overseas equivalent);
- Always use gloves if you come into contact with other people's body fluids.
- Always use gloves, dental dams or condoms if you are engaging in sexual activity if there is a chance that blood may become involved.
- Never share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers or combs.

~~WHERE CAN I GET A HEPATITIS A VACCINE NEAR ME?~~

If you need vaccination against Hepatitis A or a combined dose including Hepatitis B or polysaccharide typhoid vaccine, find a Travelvax clinic [near you](#). Our clinics across Australia are staffed by highly trained travel doctors and professionals with access to the latest equipment to help keep you safe on your next trip, either inside Australia or overseas.

**More information on Hepatitis A is available during your pre-travel consultation with Travelvax.
Call 1300 360 164 for the location of the clinic nearest to you.**