

# Hepatitis A Vaccine: Reasons to Consider Vaccination

## Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by infection with hepatitis A virus

- Hepatitis A virus is found in the feces (poop) of people who are infected with the virus. It is usually spread by getting invisible particles of hepatitis A virus-contaminated feces in your mouth.
- The most common way for you to get infected is through close personal contact, such as living with a person infected with hepatitis A virus or having sex with an infected person. You can also get infected if you travel abroad where sanitation practices may not be adequate. This might happen when you eat hepatitis A virus-contaminated food or drink hepatitis A virus-contaminated water only – and it can even happen in four-star restaurants in the United States.

## You can feel quite sick when you're infected with hepatitis A and some people die

- If you have symptoms, they usually come on suddenly and can include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, belly pain, cola-colored urine, and yellowing of the skin and eyes.
- The illness usually lasts several weeks, but you might feel sick for as long as six months.
- There is no medicine to treat you for hepatitis A – only supportive care is available.
- Safe, effective hepatitis A vaccines have been available since 1995.

## Consider your answers to the following questions

### Is all the food you eat as clean and safe as you think it is?

- Hepatitis A virus can spread when an infected food handler contaminates your food. This can happen if the food handler uses the toilet and does not wash his or her hands well before touching your food. Food can also become contaminated with hepatitis A virus during growing, harvesting, or processing.
- Your food can be contaminated in four-star restaurants, bars, catered events, schools, or even at home.
- More than 550 persons got hepatitis A after eating at a single chain restaurant in Pennsylvania. Three persons



died from liver failure. The outbreak was caused by green onions from Mexico that had been contaminated with hepatitis A virus during growing, harvesting, packing, or distribution.

- Investigators linked 64 cases of hepatitis A to food purchased at a retail buyer's club where a hepatitis A virus-infected baker contaminated baked goods while applying sugar glaze.
- 91 people were infected with hepatitis A virus after attending various events in Kentucky catered by a company employing a food handler who was infected with hepatitis A virus.
- 262 persons in five states, including children from 36 schools, ate contaminated strawberries and became infected with hepatitis A virus.

### Is all the water and ice you drink as clean and safe as you think it is?

- Food and beverage handlers in bars, restaurants, or at catered events who are infected with hepatitis A virus and don't wash their hands can contaminate your beverages, especially those containing ice.

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE ►

- Water systems can also get contaminated with hepatitis A virus when sewage systems fail to work properly.
- An outbreak of hepatitis A occurred in a Georgia trailer park served by a private well.
- 55 people got hepatitis A from drinking an ice-slush beverage purchased at a convenience market in Alaska. An employee who was infected with hepatitis A virus prepared the slush mixture in the restroom.

**Do you plan to travel to a country where eating the food and drinking the water increases your risk of getting hepatitis A?**

- Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for travelers going almost anywhere in the world. The ONLY exceptions are the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia.
- Travelers who have gotten sick include 351 persons who were infected with hepatitis A virus from drinking orange juice in an Egyptian resort hotel.

**About hepatitis A vaccine**

- Hepatitis A vaccine has been recommended for all children 1–2 years of age since 1999. The vaccine is also recommended for older children and adults who want to avoid getting hepatitis A.
- Your first dose of hepatitis A vaccine will give you excellent short-term protection against infection with hepatitis A virus.
- A second dose six months later provides you long-term protection. Almost 100% of children, adolescents, and adults get long-term protection from infection with hepatitis A virus after getting the two-dose series of hepatitis A vaccine.
- Hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective and has been available in the U.S. since 1995. No serious reactions or health problems have ever been shown to be caused by hepatitis A vaccine.

**After reading this fact sheet, talk to your healthcare provider about whether you should get protected with hepatitis A vaccine.**