

Hepatitis A Vaccine

(Havrix™, Vaqta®, Avaxim®)

What is hepatitis A?

- Hepatitis A is a highly contagious virus that attacks the liver. It interferes with the liver's ability to digest food and help to remove waste products from your body.
- Hepatitis A is most common in developing countries where there may be poor food handling and storage and inadequate water sanitation.

How does hepatitis A spread?

- The virus spreads easily by eating / drinking contaminated food or water or through direct contact with an infected individual.
- The best defense against germs is frequent hand washing; wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Follow the advice on the Safe Food and Safe Water Fact sheets.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

- Some people with hepatitis A have no symptoms, especially children under 5 years of age.
- If you do have symptoms, they will appear 2 to 7 weeks after becoming infected and may include feeling unwell with fever, nausea and vomiting, followed by jaundice, which is a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes.

Is there a cure for hepatitis A?

- There is no medication to treat or cure hepatitis A, so the symptoms are treated.
- Most people recover completely after 4 to 6 weeks and become immune to the infection; however, some people, especially the elderly and those with chronic liver problems, can develop serious health problems.

What are the benefits of the hepatitis A vaccine?

- The hepatitis A vaccine helps to protect children and adults against liver infections caused by the hepatitis A virus.
- Hepatitis A vaccines are 90 to 97% effective in preventing infections after completion of the series.
- The second dose of the vaccine series should be given 6 to 12 months after the first dose, with the exception of Avaxim®, which can be given 6 to 36 months after the first dose.
- A completed vaccine series can protect healthy individuals from hepatitis A for over 20 years.

Who should get the publicly funded (free) hepatitis A vaccine?

- Individuals 6 months of age or over who are at high risk of becoming infected with hepatitis A
 - those with chronic liver disease, including hepatitis B & C
 - intravenous drug use
 - men who have sex with men

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What are the common side effects of hepatitis A vaccine?

- Some people may feel sore and swollen for a few days where the needle was given and have headaches, fever, nausea and vomiting, or feel tired or unwell for a day or two.
- Tylenol® or ibuprofen may be taken afterwards, as directed, to reduce discomfort or fever.
- **Children under 19 years of age should not be given ASA, Aspirin® or salicylates.**

Who should not get the hepatitis A vaccine?

- Anyone who has had a serious allergic reaction to this vaccine in the past, or to any component of the vaccine:
 - **Havrix™ 1440** – 19 yrs of age and over - hepatitis A virus, aluminum hydroxide, amino acids, disodium phosphate, monopotassium phosphate, neomycin sulphate, polysorbate 20, potassium chloride, formaldehyde and sodium chloride. May contain latex.
 - **Havrix™ 720 Junior** – 6 mos. to 18 yrs of age
 - **Vaqta®** - 18 yrs of age and older - inactivated hepatitis A virus, aluminium sulfate, sodium borate, sodium chloride, trace amounts of bovine albumin, neomycin and formaldehyde. Does contain latex (in the vial stopper).
 - **Avaxim®** - 12 years of age and older - inactivated hepatitis A virus, 2-phenoxyethanol, formaldehyde, aluminum hydroxide, medium 199 Hanks, polysorbate 80, neomycin, formaldehyde. Does not contain latex.
 - **Avaxim® Pediatric** – 6 mos. to 15 yrs of age
- Anyone with a high fever, moderate to severe illness, should wait until they feel well.
- Pregnant or breastfeeding women should only be vaccinated if it is clearly necessary.

When should I seek medical attention after immunization?

- If you or your child experiences any unusual side effects, seek medical attention and notify us.
- Go to Emergency at a hospital right away or call 911 if you or your child has any of the following after immunization:
 - swelling of the face and neck
 - problems breathing
 - hives and itchy, reddened skin

Your Record of Protection

After you receive any immunization, make sure your health care provider updates your personal immunization record. Keep it in a safe place. Please inform us of any immunizations not received from public health.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Immunization Program at 613-966-5500
Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

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