

## What is hepatitis A, and why should I care?

**What is it?** Hepatitis A is a virus that infects the liver and spreads from person to person by the fecal-oral route (eating something that has been prepared by someone with hepatitis A who has not washed their hands very well after using the bathroom)

**How do I get it?** The most common risk factors are eating contaminated food, coming into contact with someone who has hepatitis A, having sex with someone who has hepatitis A, injection and even non-injection drug use, and travel to countries where it is common.

**How do I know I have it?** The symptoms are fever, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, light-colored bowel movements, and jaundice (yellow skin and eyes). You need a blood test to tell whether these symptoms are from hepatitis A, B or C.

**How bad is it?** The average adult misses work for a month, and most people have some symptoms for 2 months. It usually gets better by itself, but it can be more serious in persons over 40 years of age or who have chronic liver disease (from alcohol, or chronic hepatitis B or C. Yes, that does mean it would be bad for a baby boomer with hepatitis C).

**Why are you telling me now?** Although we have not seen an increase in rates of hepatitis A in Oregon so far this year, several other areas around the country (Southern California, New York City, and southeast Michigan, particularly Detroit) have experienced big outbreaks. The groups most affected include homeless people, persons who inject (PWID), and men who have sex with men (MSM). In Michigan, there have been 715 cases, resulting in 582 (81%) hospitalizations and 24 deaths (3%). The Public Health Division of the Oregon Health Authority is hoping to increase awareness and promote vaccination of groups at risk in Oregon to prevent widespread transmission in vulnerable populations.

**What should I do?** Vaccinate persons at risk (see opposite side)! The vaccine is very safe and 90% of patients are immune within 4 weeks of their first shot. A second shot is recommended 6 months later. Proper hygiene, such as washing hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water after using the bathroom, is critical to preventing spread.

## Who should be vaccinated against hepatitis A?

- **All children over the age of one year**
- **Persons traveling to or working in countries that have high or intermediate risk of hepatitis A** (anywhere outside of North America, Western Europe, Japan, New Zealand and Australia)
- **Men who have sex with men**
- **Users of injection and non-injection drugs.**
- **Persons who have occupational risk for infection.** Persons who work with HAV-infected primates or with HAV in a research laboratory setting should be vaccinated. No other groups have been shown to be at increased risk for HAV infection because of occupational exposure.
- **Persons who have chronic liver disease.** Persons with chronic liver disease who have never had hepatitis A should be vaccinated, as they have a higher likelihood of having fulminant hepatitis A (i.e., rapid onset of liver failure, often leading to death). Persons who are either awaiting or have received liver transplants also should be vaccinated.
- **Persons who have clotting-factor disorders.**
- **Household members and other close personal contacts of adopted children newly arriving from countries with high or intermediate hepatitis A risk.** Previously unvaccinated persons who anticipate close personal contact (e.g., household contact or regular babysitting) with an international adoptee from a country of high or intermediate risk during the first 60 days following arrival of the adoptee in the United States should be vaccinated.
- **Persons with direct contact with persons who have hepatitis A** (examples: household member, sex partner)

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