

# HEPATITIS A & B VACCINATION



## HEPATITIS A VACCINATION

Hepatitis A occurs in epidemics both nationwide and in communities. It continues to be the most frequently reported vaccine-preventable disease in the U.S. During epidemic years (1987-1997), the number of reported cases in the U.S. reached 35,000. Historically, the highest rates were reported among children and young adults. Approximately one third of reported cases involved children less than 15 years of age. In the late 1990s, however, vaccine against hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection became more widely used, and since 1998, hepatitis A rates have declined in all age groups. The number of cases has now reached historic lows.

## WHO SHOULD BE VACCINATED?

Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for all children one year and older plus the following:

- Travelers to areas with increased rates of hepatitis A;
- Men who have sex with men;
- Users of Injecting and non-injecting illegal drugs;
- Persons with clotting-factor disorders (e.g., hemophilia);
- Persons with chronic liver disease;
- Children living in areas with increased rates of hepatitis A.

The *Vaccines for Children Program* provides free hepatitis A vaccination to young people 18 years old or younger based on one or more of the following factors:

- Eligible for Medicaid;
- Have no health insurance;
- Are Native American or Alaska Native;
- Have health insurance that does not cover immunizations. In these cases, the children must go to a Federal Qualified Health Center or Rural Health Center for vaccine.

## ABOUT THE HEPATITIS A VACCINES

Hepatitis A vaccines are made from inactivated hepatitis A virus and are given in a 2-dose series. The vaccines currently licensed in the United States are HAVRIX® (GlaxoSmithKline) may be given to those 2 years and older and VAQTA® (Merck & Co., Inc.). These vaccines have proven safe and highly effective when given before exposure to hepatitis A. A combined hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine is also available for persons 18 years of age and older. Check with your doctor or nurse to determine your vaccination schedule.

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## HEPATITIS B VACCINATION

In the United States, most persons with hepatitis B acquire the infection as adolescents or young adults. Several modes of transmission have been identified, including sexual contact. The estimated 800,000 – 1.4 million persons with chronic hepatitis B in the United States are potentially infectious to others

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## **WHO SHOULD BE VACCINATED AGAINST HEPATITIS B?**

The CDC, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that all newborns, infants, and children 0-18 years of age, including children adopted from high-risk regions, be vaccinated against hepatitis B infection.

The *Vaccines for Children Program* provides free hepatitis B vaccination to mhbhyoung people 18 years old or younger based on one or more of the following factors:

- Eligible for Medicaid;
- Have no health insurance;
- Are Native American or Alaska Native;
- Have health insurance that does not cover immunizations. In these cases, the children must go to a Federal Qualified Health Center or Rural Health Center for vaccine.

All children should be vaccinated at an early age to prevent the serious consequences that can occur when youngsters under the age of 5 years become infected and develop chronic (long-term) hepatitis B. Anyone who lives in the same household or has sexual contact with a person with chronic infection is at risk of HBV infection and should be vaccinated.

Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for the following groups:

- Young people aged 0-18 years;
- Persons with multiple sex partners or diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease;
- Men who have sex with men;
- Sexual partners of infected persons;
- Injecting drug users;
- Household contacts of chronically infected persons;
- All newborns and especially Infants born to infected mothers;
- Infants and children of immigrants from areas with high rates of HBV infection;
- Health care and public safety workers.

All women vaccinated or not, should be screened with the hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) blood test during early pregnancy to determine whether they are infected with hepatitis B (HBV). Women in high-risk groups (e.g., injection drug users, women with multiple sex partners) should also be retested for HBV infection later in pregnancy. If not treated at birth, up to 90% of infants born to HBV-infected mothers might develop chronic HBV infection. This is why it is important that all newborns be vaccinated within 12 hours of delivery and for those born to infected mothers an additional injection of hepatitis B immune globulin at birth. The second dose of hepatitis B vaccine should be given at 1 to 2 months of age, and the third dose of vaccine at 6 months of age. This treatment prevents 90% to 95% of HBV infections occurring at birth. Pregnancy is not a contraindication for the use of hepatitis B vaccine.

## **ABOUT THE HEPATITIS B VACCINES**

The vaccines used to prevent HBV infection are safe and effective. The usual vaccination schedule requires 3 doses to provide long-lasting immunity. One manufacturer's vaccine can be used in a 2-dose series for children 11 to 15 years of age. Hepatitis B vaccine should be given intramuscularly and at the same time as other vaccines. Combination vaccines that contain a hepatitis B component are also available for both young children and adults. You should check with your physician for age requirements, proper scheduling, and for the other diseases that are prevented by the use of these combination vaccines. The HBV vaccine provides protection for 18 years and possibly a lifetime. No periodic boosters are recommended for HBV vaccines.

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