



Hepatitis A and B Vaccine

Saskatchewan Immunization Program

Keep your child safe. By getting all vaccines on time, your child can be protected from many preventable diseases over their lifetime. Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is hepatitis A and how is it spread?

- Hepatitis A is a virus that attacks the liver. For every 1000 people infected, 1 to 3 could die. The death rate is higher in people 50 years of age and older.
- The hepatitis A virus is found in the bowel movements (stool) of infected persons. People with hepatitis A infection who do not wash their hands can pass the virus on to others through food preparation or other hand-to-mouth contact.
- Hepatitis A can also be spread by drinking contaminated water, or by eating raw or under-cooked shellfish, such as crabs, clams, oysters or mussels, that have been contaminated with sewage.
- The disease can also be spread by sexual contact, or sharing of equipment used in drug use, such as needles or pipes.
- There is no known cure or specific treatment for hepatitis A infection.
- **Persons who have has the disease cannot get it again and make others sick.**
- **People who do not eat or drink with, or use the same bathrooms as the infected person, are not at great risk of becoming infected.**

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A infections?

- Symptoms usually last from 1-2 weeks, but may last for months and include:
 - tiredness, fever or fatigue
 - loss of appetite, nausea and/or vomiting
 - pain in the upper abdomen (stomach area)
 - jaundice (a yellow colour of the skin and whites of the eyes) pain in the upper abdomen (stomach area);
 - jaundice (a yellow color of the skin and whites of the eyes)
 - dark-colour urine and light colour stools
- Some people who are infected cannot get rid of the virus and carry it in their blood and body fluids for life. These people are called chronic carriers.
- Treatment does not provide a cure.
- The time between becoming infected with hepatitis A and becoming sick is about one month.
- Infected persons can pass the infection to others most easily up to two weeks *before* becoming sick.
- Many infected persons, especially the young, have no symptoms.

What is hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver and can cause permanent scarring and damage (cirrhosis), liver cancer and death.
- The virus is found in the body fluids including blood, semen, vaginal fluids and saliva of persons who are infected.
- Many new cases occur in early adulthood.

How is hepatitis B spread?

The hepatitis B virus is spread:

- By being stuck with an infected needle.
- By sharing razors, toothbrushes and dental floss.
- By reusing dirty and/or shared equipment for tattooing, piercings, acupuncture or needles used to inject drugs or other substances (e.g. steroids).
- Through unprotected sex.

From an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B infections?

- After the virus enters the body, it usually takes two to three months to develop signs of illness.
- About 50% of adults and 90% of children who are infected with hepatitis B do not have symptoms.
- Others can have:
 - tiredness, fatigue and fever
 - loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting

How can hepatitis A and B be prevented?

- Be immunized. The vaccine is the best way to protect against hepatitis A and B infections and their complications, including permanent liver damage, which can lead to liver cancer and death.
- When you get immunized, you help protect others as well.
- Practice good hygiene (e.g. handwashing).

Who can get the vaccine free of charge in Saskatchewan?

- Those with chronic liver disease.
- Those with hepatitis C infection (only if hepatitis A and B non-immune.)
- Those with HIV infection.
- Those with haemophilia.
- Those that are transplant recipients – bone marrow, solid organs, stem cell transplants
- Children living on reserve, and benefit from protection from both diseases.

Who should not receive the vaccine?

A mild illness, with or without fever, is not a reason to avoid immunizations.

- Persons who have a serious illness, with or without a fever, should delay immunization.
- Persons who have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine, or who have severe allergies to any of the vaccine components.
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should be given the vaccine only if clearly necessary.

What are possible reactions to the vaccine?

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get hepatitis A and B infections.

- Common reactions to the vaccine may include:
 - Soreness, redness and swelling at the injection site.
 - Headache, fatigue, fever, and stomach upset may also occur after getting the vaccine.
- These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®, and Panadol®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (Aspirin®) should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye's syndrome.

- It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in one million people who get the vaccine.

Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse or your doctor as soon as possible.

Talk to your public health nurse if:

- You have questions or concerns about your or your child's reaction to an immunization.
- You had to take your child to a doctor, hospital or health centre with an illness that might be related to an immunization.

What does the vaccine contain?

- Twinrix® Adult and Twinrix® Jr. contain: Inactivated hepatitis A virus, hepatitis B surface antigen recombinant, aluminum hydroxide, aluminum phosphate, sodium chloride, water for injection and traces of amino acids for injection, formaldehyde, neomycin sulphate and polysorbate 80. The rubber plunger and cap may contain traces of latex.

Your immunization information will be recorded in a computerized system known as the Saskatchewan Immunization Management System (SIMS).

Information collected in SIMS may be used to:

- *manage immunization record;*
- *notify you if you or your child needs an immunization; and*
- *monitor how well vaccines work in preventing vaccine preventable diseases.*

Your immunization records may also be shared with health care professionals in order to provide public health services; assist with diagnosis and treatment; and to control the spread of vaccine preventable diseases.

For more information contact:

Your local public health office,

OR your physician,

OR HealthLine at 1-877-800-0002.

References: Canadian Immunization Guide, 7th ed. (2006); Product Monograph (2008).