Immune Globulin

If a food handler becomes infected with hepatitis A, it is possible that immune globulin shots may be administered to protect customers and close contacts. Immune globulin shots boost an exposed person's immune system to fight off the virus, providing temporary protection for several months. Immune globlulin can be given before, **or within 2 weeks after**, coming in contact with hepatitis A virus.

What is Immune Globulin?

Immune Globulin (IG), also known as gamma globulin, is a sterilized solution of antibodies (antibodies are proteins from a person's immune system that fight germs) taken from donated human blood.

IG is made from concentrating the antibodies (from people with high levels) to a small volume which can be given in a shot.

When injected into a muscle, IG provides rapid, short term protection against certain illnesses, or can help make the illness less severe. Protection is temporary and should not be confused with getting a vaccination, which provides longer-term protection.

Hepatitis A Vaccine

There is a vaccine for hepatitis A. Vaccination is a 2-shot series and is available from your doctor or the health department.

The vaccine is recommended for people who are at high risk for getting the virus or are at risk for serious illness from infection (primarily people with damaged livers). See your doctor for guidance.

Other Preventive Measures: Emergency Situations

Illnesses can spread quickly during emergency situations. If your home has a sewage backup, loss of safe water, or other emergency, you should stop using the water for drinking, cooking, or handwashing.

Travel

Most countries have higher rates of hepatitis A than the United States. Talk with your doctor about your risks if you travel abroad.

Shellfish

Many outbreaks of hepatitis A have been traced to shellfish harvested from contaminated growing beds. Precautions include:

- ◇ Thoroughly cook all shellfish. Raw or undercooked shellfish has not been heated to a hot enough temperature to destroy the hepatitis A virus or other pathogens, if present.
- ◇ Get shellfish from approved sources.

Children

Children infected with hepatitis A often show no symptoms of illness, but are still contagious. If your child is in child care:

- ◇ Keep your child at home if he or she is feeling ill. Child care is for healthy children.
- ◇ Notify your child care provider and the health department if your child or anyone in your house becomes ill with hepatitis A.

For more information contact:

Benton-Franklin Health District
Environmental Health Division
7102 W. Okanogan Pl.
Kennewick, WA 99336
(509) 460-4205
www.bfhd.wa.gov

Related brochures available:
"Preventing Hepatitis A"
"Handwashing"

For more information on Hepatitis-
Centers for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/a

BFHD-E-0006 (Rev. 04/08)

Hepatitis A

Facts About Germs Series

www.bfhd.wa.gov

PUBLIC HEALTH
Prevent • Promote • Protect
BENTON-FRANKLIN HEALTH DISTRICT

What Is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that is easily spread from person to person—it is estimated that about 1/3 of Americans have been exposed to the virus. Hepatitis A affects the liver and can cause mild to severe illness. Good personal hygiene and proper sanitation can help prevent hepatitis A.

Symptoms Of Hepatitis A

The likelihood of having symptoms is related to your age. The older you are, the more likely you will have symptoms; most children (70%) under 6 years old will show no symptoms when they are infected. Once you have been infected with hepatitis A, you become immune to it and will not get sick if you get exposed to it again.

On average, symptoms begin about 28 days after infection. During the asymptomatic period, a person is infectious and may spread the virus to a large number of people. The virus can still be spread for at least two weeks after the symptoms have begun.

Symptoms are flu-like and may include:

- ◊ fever
- ◊ muscle aches
- ◊ fatigue
- ◊ nausea
- ◊ vomiting
- ◊ lack of appetite
- ◊ an enlarged and tender liver
- ◊ dark urine
- ◊ jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

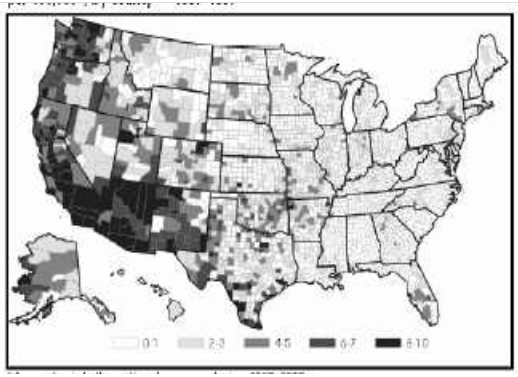
Hepatitis A symptoms usually last for about 4 weeks. For a small number of people, relapses may occur and symptoms may continue for about 15 months. Severe liver damage is possible and an estimated 100 Americans die each year due to complications from infection with the hepatitis A virus.

Contact your doctor if you think you have this illness or have been exposed to it. A blood test is the only method to confirm a person has hepatitis A. Although a person can get hepatitis A only once, immunity to this virus will not offer protection against the other types of hepatitis viruses (like B, C, or D).

Number of years that counties reported incidence of Hepatitis A exceeding 10 cases per 100,000 1987-1997

Washington state routinely has rates of Hepatitis A that exceed the United States average.

Between 1987-1997, Washington (with a rate of 30 cases per 100, 000 residents) averaged almost 3 times the national average!



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention of Hepatitis A through active or passive immunization: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). MMWR 1999; 48 (No. RR-12):[p 15].

How Is Hepatitis A Spread?

Very rarely, hepatitis A infection can occur from transfusions of blood products from a highly infectious donor. **Hepatitis A is usually spread the fecal-oral route by:**

- ◊ close or intimate person to person contact,
- ◊ putting something in the mouth, including food, (even though it may look clean) that has been contaminated with the feces of a person with hepatitis A, or
- ◊ ingestion of sewage-contaminated water.

Foodborne Hepatitis A

A person infected with hepatitis A can get the virus on the hands after a bowel movement. Without adequate handwashing, the virus can contaminate any food, drink, or other item touched by the infected person. The virus is then spread to another person who ingests the food or drink.

Because the hepatitis A virus is destroyed by high cooking temperatures, foods associated with outbreaks are generally eaten uncooked or are handled after cooking. They include:

- ◊ **Cold items**, such as salads, deli sandwiches, fruits, vegetables, garnishes, and iced drinks;
- ◊ **Foods handled after cooking**, such as hot dogs, hamburgers, or taco salads; and
- ◊ **Raw or undercooked shellfish** harvested from contaminated beds.

Be careful when preparing or handling these ready-to-eat foods.

Prevention Of Hepatitis A

Depending on the environment, the hepatitis A virus can be stable for months. Freezing does not destroy the virus, but heating foods to high temperatures or disinfecting surfaces with a sanitizer will inactivate it.

Handwashing is the cheapest effective measure you can take to prevent the spread of hepatitis A, and other illnesses.

Be sure to wash hands properly:

- ◊ Wet hands with warm water
- ◊ Use liquid or powdered hand soap
- ◊ Lather and scrub hands for at least 20 seconds
- ◊ Rinse hands with warm running water
- ◊ Dry hands with paper towels
- ◊ Turn off faucet with a paper towel
- ◊ Grab the doorknob with the paper towel

Another method to prevent illness spread is to make sure **ill persons do not prepare or handle food or drinks**. This is true for most illnesses to prevent germs from spreading.

Group settings such as restaurants, hospitals, and child and elder care facilities can encourage hepatitis A to spread easily. No matter how clean the facility, the virus can spread if proper handwashing and sanitation practices are not routinely followed by everyone.