

Hepatitis A Vaccine

Vaccines have saved more lives compared to any other medical intervention. Vaccines help the immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause serious diseases

Hepatitis A is a vaccine preventable disease.

- **Hepatitis A (HA)** is a virus that infects the liver. For every 1,000 people infected, 1 to 3 could die. In adults 50 years and older, 1 in 4 adults with HA are hospitalized and 18 out of 1,000 cases can die.
- There is no cure or specific treatment for HA infection as it is a self-limiting disease.
- HA is spread through the fecal-oral route:
 - By ingesting contaminated food or water (e.g., through food preparation by infected food handlers);
 - From direct person-to-person contact; or
 - From contamination of the environment or objects (e.g., on counter tops and on dishes) as the HA virus may remain infectious in the environment for several weeks.
- People who eat or drink with or use the same bathrooms as a person who is infectious with HA are at high risk of becoming infected themselves.
- HA can be spread by sexual contact or through sharing of equipment used for drug use such as straws or pipes.

What are the symptoms of HA?

- The time between becoming infected and developing symptoms is 15 to 50 days.
- Symptoms usually last from 1-2 weeks, but may last for months and include:
 - Fatigue, fever, loss of appetite and nausea.
 - Jaundice (yellow colouring of the skin and whites of the eyes).
 - Dark-colour urine and light colour stools.
- Some infected persons may not develop any symptoms but can still spread the HA virus.
- Cases are infectious 2 weeks before they start developing symptoms and for 1 week after developing jaundice.

How can HA be prevented?

- Be immunized. When you / your child are immunized, you help protect others as well.
- Practice good hygiene (e.g. handwashing).

Who can get this vaccine for free?

- HA case contacts 6 months and older who are identified within 14 days of an exposure.
- Children aged 1-15 years living in northern health regions or on reserves in Saskatchewan (excluded: Creighton, Air Ronge and La Ronge).
- Liver transplant candidates or recipients.
- Haematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT) recipients.
- Non-immune individuals with bleeding disorders and others who receive repeated infusions of blood or blood products or plasma-derived replacement clotting factors.
- Individuals who have chronic liver disease (including alcoholism, hepatitis C, hepatitis B, cirrhosis) who are non-immune to HA.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Individuals that use or share illicit drug snorting, smoking or injection equipment.
- Sexual partners and household contacts of individuals who use illicit drugs.

Who should not get this vaccine?

- Persons who have a serious acute illness, with or without a fever, should delay immunization.
- Persons who have had a serious or life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of a HA containing vaccine, or any components of the vaccine.

What are common reactions to this vaccine?

- **Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get this vaccine than to get HA.**
- Temporary soreness, redness and swelling where the needle was given.
- Headache, fatigue, fever, and stomach upset may also occur after getting the vaccine.
- These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days.
- Only treat a fever (at least 6 to 8 hours after immunization) if you/your child are uncomfortable, refusing fluids and not sleeping.

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. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in one million people who get the vaccine. **If this happens after you leave the clinic, get medical attention or call 911 right away.**

Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor, nurse practitioner or 811 as soon as possible.

Talk to a public health nurse:

- If you have questions or concerns about you or your child's reaction to an immunization.
- If you or your child had to go to a doctor, a hospital or to a health centre with a symptom that might be related to immunization.

For more information, contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner, HealthLine online or by calling 811.

Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents/guardians discuss consent for immunization with their children. Efforts are first made to get parental/guardian consent for immunizations. However, children at least 13 years of age up to and including 17 years of age, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risks of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations in Saskatchewan by providing mature minor informed consent to a healthcare provider.

What does this vaccine contain?

AVAXIM® contains inactivated hepatitis A virus (GBM strain), 2- phenoxyethanol, ethanol anhydrous, formaldehyde, aluminum hydroxide (expressed as aluminum), Medium 199 Hanks in water for injection, neomycin is present in trace amounts. Thimerosal-free. Latex-free.

HAVRIX® 1440 and **HAVRIX® 720** contain formaldehyde-inactivated hepatitis A virus, aluminum hydroxide, amino acids for injection, disodium phosphate, monopotassium phosphate, polysorbate 20, potassium chloride, sodium chloride and water for injection. Residue from manufacturing process: neomycin sulfate. Thimerosal-free. Latex-free.

VAQTA® contains inactivated hepatitis A virus protein, amorphous aluminum hydroxyphosphate sulfate, sodium borate, sodium chloride, water for injection, trace amounts of neomycin, bovine albumin, and formaldehyde. Thimerosal-free. Latex is present in the vial stopper.

Provincial immunization fact sheets are available at www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize.

References: [Canadian Immunization Guide](#). Product monographs (AVAXIM® 2021; HAVRIX® 2021; VAQTA® 2023).

Use **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol®, Tempra®) or **Ibuprofen** (Advil®, Motrin®) to treat fevers and pain in children and adults. **Never give ASA** (Aspirin®) to anyone younger than 18 years old because of the serious risk of Reye's syndrome.