Hepatitis A –Questions and Answers

What is hepatitis A? Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.

How is hepatitis A virus spread? Hepatitis A virus is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. This type of transmission is called "fecal-oral." For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where good personal hygiene is not observed. Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A, or by ingesting food or water contaminated with the Hepatitis A virus. Casual contact, as in the usual office, factory, or school setting, does not spread the virus.

What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis A? Persons with hepatitis A virus infection may not have any signs or symptoms of the disease. Older persons are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms are present, they may include:

Fever	Tiredness
Loss of appetite	Nausea
Abdominal discomfort	Dark urine/light tan or gray stools

Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

Symptoms usually last less than 2 months; a few persons are ill for as long as 6 months. The average incubation period for hepatitis A is 28 days (range: 15–50 days).

How do you know if you have hepatitis A? A blood test is needed to diagnose hepatitis A. Talk to your doctor or someone from your local health department if you suspect that you have been exposed to hepatitis A or any type of viral hepatitis.

What are the long term effects of Hepatitis A infection? There are no long-term effects of Hepatitis A infection. Once you have had hepatitis A, you cannot get it again. About 15% of persons who get Hepatitis A will have prolonged symptoms for 6-9 months.

How can you prevent hepatitis A? Always wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing or eating food.

Two products are used to prevent hepatitis A virus infection: immune globulin and hepatitis A vaccine.

1. Immune globulin is a preparation of antibodies that can be given before exposure for short-term protection against hepatitis A and for persons who have already been exposed to hepatitis A virus. Immune globulin must be given within 2 weeks after exposure to hepatitis A virus for maximum protection. The vaccine is not given to children under 2 years of age
2. Hepatitis A vaccine has been licensed in the United States for use in persons 2 years of age and older. The vaccine is recommended (before exposure to hepatitis A virus) for persons who are more likely to get hepatitis A virus infection or are more likely to get seriously ill if they do get hepatitis A.

Vaccine Questions and Answers

What is immune globulin? Immune globulin is a preparation of antibodies that can be given before exposure for short-term protection against hepatitis A and for persons who have already been exposed to hepatitis A virus. Immune globulin must be given within 2 weeks after exposure to hepatitis A virus for maximum protection.

Is immune globulin safe? Yes. No instance of transmission of HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) or other viruses has been observed with the use of immune globulin administered by the intramuscular route. Immune globulin can be administered during pregnancy and breast-feeding.

Is immune globulin in short supply? No. The Michigan Department of Community Health has assured use that we can get sufficient supply from them in an emergency

Can hepatitis A vaccine be given after exposure to hepatitis A virus? No, hepatitis A vaccine is not licensed for use after exposure to hepatitis A virus. In this situation, immune globulin should be used.

Is hepatitis A vaccine safe? Yes, hepatitis A vaccine has an excellent safety profile. No serious adverse events have been attributed definitively to hepatitis A vaccine. Soreness at the injection site is the most frequently reported side effect. This vaccine is now recommended for children.

Can hepatitis A vaccine be given during pregnancy? We don't know for sure, but because vaccine is produced from inactivated hepatitis A virus, the theoretical risk to the developing fetus is expected to be low. The risk associated with vaccination, however, should be weighed against the risk for hepatitis A in women who may be at high risk for exposure to hepatitis A virus.

How long does hepatitis A vaccine protect you? Although data on long-term protection are limited, estimates based on modeling techniques suggest that protection will last for at least 20 years.

When are persons protected after receiving hepatitis A vaccine? Protection against hepatitis A begins four weeks after the first dose of hepatitis A vaccine.

For more information about Hepatitis A or other health concerns, please visit our website at:

WWW.BHSJ.ORG

Or you can call one of our 4 clinic sites at the following numbers:

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Coldwater	Hillsdale	Sturgis	Three Rivers
517-279-9561 x 132	**517-437-7395 x 121**	**269-659-4013 x 108**	**269-273-2161 x 207**