

Protect Yourself Against Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B...

A GUIDE FOR GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN

Men who have sex with men are at increased risk of becoming infected with both the hepatitis A virus and the hepatitis B virus. Although these viruses can be transmitted in different ways, both can be spread through sexual activity.

Hepatitis is a serious disease that can be fatal. Fortunately, both hepatitis A and hepatitis B can be prevented by safe and effective vaccines. Unfortunately, many men at risk remain unprotected.

How great is my risk of getting hepatitis infection?

In 2015 an estimated 21,900 persons in the U.S. were newly infected with the hepatitis B virus. About 5% of people in the U.S. will get infected sometime during their lives. Men who have sex with men are 10 to 15 times more likely to acquire the hepatitis B virus than the general population.

In 2015 an estimated 2,800 persons in the U.S. were infected with the hepatitis A virus. Persons who engage in anal pleasuring activities such as rimming and fingering are at increased risk.

How are hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus spread?

A man infected with hepatitis B virus can spread the virus to another person by

- having unprotected anal or vaginal sex
- sharing needles for drugs, piercing, or tattooing
- coming in contact with the infected person's open sores or blood
- sharing toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, etc.

The hepatitis B virus can also be spread by living in a household with a chronically infected person. The hepatitis B virus is not spread by sharing eating utensils, hugging, kissing, hand holding, coughing, or sneezing.

Hepatitis A virus is usually transmitted from particles of fecal material, for example, by eating or drinking contaminated food or water or during sex.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A and hepatitis B?

The symptoms of both diseases are similar: extreme tiredness, nausea, fever, dark urine, bloated and tender belly, and yellowish-tinged skin and eyes. Infected persons can have no symptoms at all or be extremely ill. However, people who are infected with either hepatitis A virus or hepatitis B virus can spread the disease to others, whether they have symptoms or not.

Do people fully recover from hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus infections?

Most adults recover from hepatitis B virus infection after several months and are no longer contagious. Unfortunately, about 5% of adults who become infected with hepatitis B virus will carry the virus in their bodies for years and remain infectious. Chronically infected people usually do not have symptoms, but are at increased risk for eventual liver failure (cirrhosis) and liver cancer and need ongoing medical care. An estimated 850,000 to 1.4 million people in the U.S. (and 350 million in the world) are chronically infected.

Although hepatitis A virus does not result in chronic infection, infected people can become very sick and sometimes die.

How serious are hepatitis A and hepatitis B virus infections?

Hepatitis B virus infection can cause serious liver disease, including liver failure and liver cancer. In 2015, there were 1,750 deaths in the U.S. from hepatitis B-related liver disease.

During the years 2011 through 2015 there were an average of 74 deaths each year in the U.S. from hepatitis A. About 15% of people with hepatitis A require hospitalization. Adults who become ill are often out of work for several weeks.

Becoming infected with hepatitis A virus or hepatitis B virus can have a major impact on a person's life. A person might be too sick to work or go to the gym for months, and should not drink alcohol. Hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus infection can have serious consequences for people with HIV, as their immune systems might be compromised.

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How can I protect myself from hepatitis B virus infection?

- Get the hepatitis B shots
- Practice safer sex
- Tell your friends at risk to get vaccinated against hepatitis B

How can I protect myself from hepatitis A virus infection?

- Get the hepatitis A shots
- Practice safer sex
- Tell your friends at risk to get vaccinated against hepatitis A

How do I know if I have or have had hepatitis A virus or hepatitis B virus infection?

The only way to know for sure is to have your blood tested.

Should I have my blood tested before getting vaccinated?

Discuss this with your doctor to decide if it is appropriate to perform blood tests first. If you have already been infected with hepatitis A virus or hepatitis B virus, getting the vaccines will not help or hurt you.

How many shots do I need to be protected against hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus infections?

The hepatitis B vaccine series consists of two or three doses given over one to six months, depending on the vaccine brand.

The hepatitis A series consists of two doses given 6 to 18 months apart. If you started either series but didn't get all the doses, you should continue where you left off.

A combined hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine is available for adults who need protection against both hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus infections. This vaccine consists of three doses given over a 6-month period.

Are these shots safe? Do they have any side effects?

Both hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines have been proven to be safe. Globally, more than one billion hepatitis B vaccine doses have been given. Since 1995, more than 15 million doses of hepatitis A vaccine have been given in the U.S. with no reports of serious health problems linked to the vaccine.

Side effects might include soreness at the injection site, headache, and fatigue.

Are these shots effective?

Yes. After two or three doses, depending on vaccine brand, at least 90% of healthy young adults develop immunity to hepatitis B virus infection. Immune-compromised people might not respond as well to hepatitis B vaccine. They should be tested 1–2 months after the third dose of vaccine to see if they responded.

Almost 100% of people are protected from hepatitis A virus infection after getting two doses of hepatitis A vaccine.

Will hepatitis A or hepatitis B vaccine protect me from hepatitis C?

No. Hepatitis A, B, and C are all different viruses. The hepatitis C virus is spread through body fluids, and although it can be transmitted through sexual contact, it is most commonly acquired through injection drug use. Unfortunately, there is no hepatitis C vaccine at this time.

Are these shots recommended for travelers?

Both hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus infection are common in many parts of the world. People traveling to any area of the world except the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia should get vaccinated against hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for many travelers also. Discuss this with your doctor.

Where can I receive these shots?

Talk to your healthcare professional or your local public health department.

EVERYONE NEEDS VACCINATIONS!

If you can't afford shots or don't have where to get them, contact your local or state health department to find out where to go for affordable vaccinations.

You can access a listing of telephone numbers for state immunization programs at www.immunize.org/coordinators.

For more information, go to www.vaccineinformation.org or www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.