A Guide for Gay and Bisexual Men about Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B

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 2009 an estimated 38,000 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 2010 an estimated 17,000 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 both 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 800,000 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. More than 5,000 people in the U.S. die every year from hepatitis B-related liver disease.

There are approximately 100 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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Are these shots effective?

Yes. After three doses of hepatitis B vaccine, 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 virus 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.

EVENYONE NEEDS VACCINATIONS!

If you can’t afford shots or don’t 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.

A needle coordinator is available to assist with program needs.

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