NEW! Handouts about Hepatitis A Vaccinations for Your Patients

Hepatitis A Vaccine: Reasons to Consider Vaccination

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by infection with hepatitis A virus.
- Hepatitis A virus is found in the feces (poop) of people who are infected with the virus. It is usually spread by getting invisible particles of hepatitis A virus-containing feces in your mouth.
- The most common way for you to get infected is through close personal contact, such as living with a person infected with hepatitis A virus or having sex with an infected person. You can also get infected if you travel abroad where sanitation practices may not be adequate. This might happen when you eat hepatitis A virus-contaminated food or drink hepatitis A virus-contaminated water only – and it can even happen in four-star restaurants in the United States.
- You can feel quite sick when you’re infected with hepatitis A and some people die
  - If you have symptoms, they usually come on suddenly and can include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, belly pain, color changes in the skin and eyes.
  - The illness usually lasts several weeks, but you might feel sick for as long as six months.
  - There is no medicine to treat you for hepatitis A – only supportive care is available.
  - Safe, effective hepatitis A vaccines have been available since 1995.

Consider your answers to the following questions
Is all the food you eat as clean and safe as you think it is?
- Hepatitis A virus can spread when an infected food handler contaminates your food. This can happen if the food handler uses the toilet and does not wash his or her hands well before touching your food. Food can also become contaminated with hepatitis A virus during growing, harvesting, or processing.
- Your food can be contaminated in four-star restaurants, bars, catered events, schools, or even at home.
- More than 500 persons got hepatitis A after eating at a single chain restaurant in Pennsylvania. Three persons died from liver failure. The outbreak started when an infected worker was trying to make a sugar glaze.
- 91 people were infected with hepatitis A virus at a Kentucky school when an infected food handler who was a student ate contaminted straws.

What is hepatitis A?
Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by infection with the hepatitis A virus.

How is hepatitis A virus spread?
Hepatitis A virus is usually spread from getting particles of fecal material (poop) into your mouth that are too small to be seen. This can happen through household or sexual contact with an infected person or by eating hepatitis A virus-contaminated food or drinking hepatitis A virus-contaminated water. Casual contact, such as in a school or work setting, has not been known to spread hepatitis A virus.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A virus infection?
Infectious people can have no symptoms at all or be extremely ill. Only 30% of children less than six years of age develop symptoms, while 70% of older children and adults develop symptoms.
- If a person does develop symptoms, they might include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain, dark urine, and jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin).
- Some symptoms can last up to six months. Even without symptoms, people infected with hepatitis A virus can spread the infection to others.

How serious is hepatitis A virus infection?
About 30% of people with hepatitis A virus require hospitalization. Adults who become ill often miss several weeks of work. Although deaths due to hepatitis A virus are uncommon, death still can occur from overwhelming hepatitis A virus infection that causes liver failure.

How can hepatitis A virus infection be prevented?
Safe and effective vaccines to prevent hepatitis A virus infection have been available in the U.S. since 1995. Good hand washing will also help reduce the spread of hepatitis A virus. Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing a diaper, and before preparing or eating food.

Who should get hepatitis A vaccine?
The following groups of people should get vaccinated against hepatitis A virus:
- Any person who wishes to be protected from hepatitis A virus infection
- All children who are 12 to 23 months of age
- Men who have sex with men
- Users of street drugs (injecting and non-injecting)
- People who travel or work in any area of the world except the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia
- People who will have close personal contact with an international adoptee from a country where hepatitis A virus infection is common (all countries except the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia) during the first 60 days following the adoptee’s arrival in the U.S.
- People with chronic liver disease, including hepatitis C
- People working with hepatitis A virus in a laboratory
- People with clotting factor disorders (such as hemophilia)
- People who have been exposed to hepatitis A virus in the past 2 weeks

For families considering international adoption, who should receive hepatitis A vaccine?
People who anticipate having close personal contact (such as household contact or regular babysitting) with an international adoptee from a country where hepatitis A virus infection is common (all countries except the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia) during the first 60 days following the adoptee’s arrival in the U.S. should get the vaccine. In addition to the adoptee’s new parents and siblings, this group could include grandparents and other members of the extended family, caregivers, and healthcare providers. Ideally, the first dose of hepatitis A vaccine should be given to close contacts as soon as adoption is planned but no later than 2 weeks prior to the arrival of the adoptee. A second dose should be given no sooner than 6 months after the first dose.

To learn more about hepatitis A vaccine, visit immunize.org.

For ready-to-copy 8½ x 11” versions of these 2-page pieces, visit
www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4080.pdf