

# Hepatitis A and the Vaccine (Shot) to Prevent It

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**The best way to protect against hepatitis A is by getting the hepatitis A vaccine. Doctors recommend that all children get the vaccine.**

## Why should my child get the hepatitis A shot?

The hepatitis A shot:

- Protects your child against hepatitis A, a potentially serious disease
- Protects other people from the disease because children with hepatitis A often don't have symptoms, but they often pass the disease to others, including their unvaccinated parents or caregivers, without anyone knowing they were infected
- Prevents your child from getting sick from hepatitis A as he or she gets older, when the disease is more serious
- Keeps your child from missing school or childcare (and keeps you from missing work to care for your sick child or if you become sick with hepatitis A infection)

## Is the hepatitis A shot safe?

The hepatitis A vaccine is very safe, and it is effective at preventing the hepatitis A disease. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. About half of the people who get the hepatitis A vaccine have no side effects at all. In the other half of people, most report having very mild side effects, like a sore arm from the shot for a day or two.

## What are the side effects?

The most common side effects are usually mild and last 1 or 2 days. They include the following:

- Sore arm from the shot
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Fever
- Loss of appetite (not wanting to eat)

## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. Children with the virus often don't have symptoms, but they often pass the disease to others, including their unvaccinated parents or caregivers. These individuals can get very sick.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Children under 6 years old often have no symptoms.

Older children and adults feel very sick and weak.

Symptoms usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after a person gets the virus. The symptoms may include the following:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite (not wanting to eat)
- Tiredness
- Stomach pain
- Vomiting
- Dark urine
- Yellow skin and eyes



Doctors recommend that your child get 2 doses of the hepatitis A shot for best protection. He or she should get the first dose at 12 through 23 months. He or she will need the second dose 6 to 18 months after the first.

## Is it serious?

Most people with hepatitis A feel very sick for about 2 months. Some people are sick for up to 6 months. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Some people with hepatitis A get so sick that they need care in the hospital. About 100 people in the U.S. die each year from liver failure caused by hepatitis A.

## How does hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of a person who has the virus. It spreads when a person puts something in his or her mouth that has the hepatitis A virus on it. Even if the item looks clean, it can still have virus from stool on it that can spread to others. The amount of virus can be so tiny that it cannot be seen with the naked eye. You can get it by touching objects such as doorknobs or diapers or eating food that has the virus on it.

## Where can I learn more about the hepatitis A vaccine and my child?

To learn more about the hepatitis A vaccine, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.