

# Hepatitis A

Potential Hepatitis A Exposure from a Food Establishment | Frequently Asked Questions

Central District Health | Updated Sept. 2019

Central District Health (CDH) has confirmed three cases of hepatitis A in food service workers employed at three separate food establishments during various timeframes in June, July and August 2019.

Hepatitis A is a virus that affects the liver and can make people sick for a number of weeks. To-date, the food service workers are the only hepatitis A cases in Idaho associated with these establishments. For a full list of establishments, possible exposure dates identified and next steps, visit [www.cdhd.idaho.gov/dac-hepa.php](http://www.cdhd.idaho.gov/dac-hepa.php).

The risk of becoming infected with hepatitis A through an infected food service worker is low but CDH encourages anyone who was a patron on any of the dates identified, and has not received a hepatitis A vaccine, or is unsure about their vaccine status, to consider getting vaccinated. **In order for the hepatitis A vaccine to help prevent possible transmission, patrons must get the vaccine within two weeks of the date they may have been exposed.**

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## FAQs

### **I ate at the restaurant/establishment identified, but it was more than two weeks ago:**

This is a very low risk situation, but if you ate at the restaurant/establishment more than two weeks ago, you are unfortunately outside of the window for a hepatitis A post exposure vaccine for this event. If you have not had hepatitis A in the past or have not been vaccinated please make sure to watch for the common signs and symptoms, which typically develop around four weeks after exposure if you have been infected. Check in with your physician if you are experiencing any of those. We still recommend checking your immunization status with your physician and getting up to date on your vaccines.

### **I ate at one of the mentioned establishments, but it was on a day that isn't listed:**

The dates listed are the days that patrons may have been exposed to hepatitis A; if you were not a patron on one of those days you were not exposed. We still recommend checking your immunization status with your physician and getting up to date on your vaccines if needed.

### **Should I be tested for hepatitis A?**

Testing for hepatitis A is not recommended and is only indicated when one is experiencing symptoms. The best plan of action is to check your immunization status and talk to your primary care physician if you feel you are experiencing any of the common signs and symptoms of hepatitis A. Hepatitis A symptoms typically develop around 4 weeks after exposure if you have been infected.

*Continued —*

*Common signs and symptoms:*

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Diarrhea
- Clay-colored stools
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

### **How can food service workers spread hepatitis A?**

While food service workers are not at an increased risk of getting hepatitis A, if they do become infected, they may more easily spread the disease due to the nature of their work which often includes contact with food, utensils and surfaces.

### **I don't know if I've been vaccinated for hepatitis A. How can I check?**

If you received vaccines as a child or adult in the state of Idaho, your health care provider or the health department may be able to look up your records in IRIS, the state's immunization registry. Call your health care provider or your local health department. In Ada, Boise, Elmore and Valley Counties, call CDHD at 208-321-2222. Due to the volume of calls we are receiving, you may need to leave a message. However, someone will return your call.

### **If I was potentially exposed, how can I make an appointment for a free hepatitis A vaccine?**

To receive protection, you must receive the hepatitis A vaccine within two weeks of your potential exposure. If you were a patron at a named establishment on an identified date and it is within the two-week window of possible exposure, you may qualify for a free hepatitis A vaccine with CDH. Call 208-321-2222 to inquire. Due to the volume of calls we may receive, you may need to leave a message. However, someone will return your call. Note: Where applicable, CDH will bill insurance for an administrative vaccine fee. However, there will not be any out-of-pocket cost to you.

### **Where else can I get a hepatitis A vaccine?**

Many health care providers and pharmacies offer the hepatitis A vaccine (for a charge). Call your primary health care provider or pharmacy to learn if they offer this vaccine. Other community clinics may offer the hepatitis A vaccine for low or no cost, depending on your risk level. Call to learn more.

[Terry Reilly Boise](#) | 208-344-3512

[Southwest District Health](#) (Offices in Caldwell, Emmett, Payette and Weiser) | 208-455-5300

[Family Medicine Health Center](#) | 208-514-2510

[a.I.p.h.a. \(Allies Linked for the Prevention of HIV and AIDS\)](#) | 208-424-7799

# Hepatitis A

## Overview

### What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. Heavy alcohol use, some medications, toxins, and certain medical conditions can cause hepatitis.

Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. Although all types of viral hepatitis can cause similar symptoms, they are spread in different ways, have different treatments, and some are more serious than others.

### Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A can be prevented with a vaccine. People who get hepatitis A may feel sick for a few weeks to several months but usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage.

In rare cases, hepatitis A can cause liver failure and even death; this is more common in older people and in people with other serious health issues, such as chronic liver disease.

### How common is hepatitis A?

Since the hepatitis A vaccine was first recommended in 1996, cases of hepatitis A in the United States have declined dramatically. Unfortunately, in recent years the number of people infected has been increasing because there have been multiple outbreaks of hepatitis A in the United States. These outbreaks have primarily been from person-to-person contact, especially among people who use drugs, people experiencing homelessness, and men who have sex with men.

### How is hepatitis A spread?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool and blood of people who are infected. The hepatitis A virus is spread when someone ingests the virus, usually through:

#### → Person-to-person contact

Hepatitis A can be spread from close, personal contact with an infected person, such as through having sex, caring for someone who is ill, or using drugs with others. Hepatitis A is very contagious, and people can even spread the virus before they feel sick.

#### → Eating contaminated food or drink

Contamination of food with the hepatitis A virus can happen at any point: growing, harvesting, processing, handling, and even after cooking. Contamination of food and water happens more often in countries where hepatitis A is common. Although uncommon, foodborne outbreaks have occurred in the United States from people eating contaminated fresh and frozen imported food products.

**Hepatitis A can be prevented with a safe and effective vaccine.**



## Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis A.

The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective. The vaccine series usually consists of 2 shots, given 6 months apart. Getting both shots provides the best protection against hepatitis A.

### Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for:

- All children at age 1 year
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common
- Family and caregivers of adoptees from countries where hepatitis A is common
- Men who have sexual encounters with other men
- People who use or inject drugs
- People with chronic or long-term liver disease, including hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- People with clotting factor disorders
- People with direct contact with others who have hepatitis A
- People experiencing homelessness

## You can prevent infection even after you have been exposed.

If you have been exposed to the hepatitis A virus in the last 2 weeks, talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated. A single shot of the hepatitis A vaccine can help prevent hepatitis A if given within 2 weeks of exposure. Depending upon your age and health, your doctor may recommend immune globulin in addition to the hepatitis A vaccine.

## Handwashing plays an important role in prevention.

Practicing good hand hygiene—including thoroughly washing hands with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food—plays an important role in preventing the spread of many illnesses, including hepatitis A.

## Symptoms

Not everyone with hepatitis A has symptoms. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 2 to 7 weeks after infection and can include:

- ✓ Yellow skin or eyes
- ✓ Fever
- ✓ Not wanting to eat
- ✓ Dark urine or light-colored stools
- ✓ Upset stomach
- ✓ Diarrhea
- ✓ Throwing up
- ✓ Joint pain
- ✓ Stomach pain
- ✓ Feeling tired

Symptoms usually last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill for as long as 6 months.

## Diagnosis and treatment

A doctor can determine if you have hepatitis A by discussing your symptoms and taking a blood sample. To treat the symptoms of hepatitis A, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. Some people will need medical care in a hospital.

## International travel and hepatitis A

If you are planning to travel to countries where hepatitis A is common, talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated before you travel. Travelers to urban areas, resorts, and luxury hotels in countries where hepatitis A is common are still at risk. International travelers have been infected, even though they regularly washed their hands and were careful about what they drank and ate.

