Should I get vaccinated?

The CDC and other public health officials recommend hepatitis A vaccination for those at increased risk for infection, specifically persons traveling to or working in areas with increased rates of hepatitis A, men who have sex with men, injecting and non-injecting illegal drug users, those with occupational risk of exposure, persons with clotting factor disorders (such as hemophilia), persons with chronic liver disease, and children living in areas with increased rates of hepatitis A between 1987 and 1997.

Routine vaccination for hepatitis B is recommended for all persons from infancy to age 18. All babies should be given their first dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth before leaving the hospital. CDC also recommends vaccination for those at increased risk of hepatitis B infection, including persons who share a household with, or are a sexual partner of someone with hepatitis B, travelers to areas with increased rates of hepatitis B, men who have sex with men, injecting and non-injecting illegal drug users, workers in a healthcare setting or those with other occupational risk of exposure, and recipients of some blood products (those with clotting factor concentrates).

Go to a local, state or private healthcare provider and ask to be vaccinated.

How can I make sex safer?

The best way to prevent any sexually transmitted infection (STI) is to not have sex. If you do have sex, especially with a partner who may have hepatitis A or B, here are ways to reduce your risk:

- Practice “outercourse”. Cuddling, masturbating, fantasizing, body-to-body rubbing and massage are safe because no blood, semen or vaginal fluids get into the body.
- Latex or polyurethane condoms are available for both men and women and should be used for vaginal, oral and anal sex.
- Use moisture barriers for oral sex as well as oral-anal contact (rimming). Barriers include dental dams and plastic wrap. Cut a rolled non-spermicidal latex condom with a pair of scissors from the edge of the center and unroll the resulting sheet of latex for use during oral-vaginal and oral-anal contact.
- Limit the number of sex partners you have. If you’re having sex with several different partners, ask your doctor to check you for STIs every 6 months, even if you don’t have symptoms.
- Avoid mixing alcohol or other drugs with sexual activities. They can lead to unsafe sex.

Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are effective at reducing the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, if the condom covers the affected area or site of potential exposure. To reduce risk of transmission of herpes, couples should abstain from sexual intercourse during an outbreak.

ASHA’s STI Resource Center provides up-to-date, sensitive and accurate information about all aspects of HEPATITIS.

STI Resource Center
1-800-227-8922
Monday - Friday, 9 am to 6 pm EST

Where can I get more information?

- Call ASHA’s STI Resource Center, 919-361-8488, or go to www.ashastd.org/learn/learn_hepatitis.cfm.
- Visit the CDC’s viral hepatitis Web pages at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.

Since 1914, the American Social Health Association (ASHA) has been dedicated to improving the health of individuals, families, and communities, with a focus on preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and their harmful consequences. ASHA has pursued its mission through education, communication, advocacy and policy analysis activities. These are designed to heighten public, patient, provider, policymaker and media awareness of STI prevention, screening, diagnosis and treatment strategies. ASHA publishes this and other materials to provide a valuable resource for accurate medical information and emotional support for those affected by sexually transmitted infections.

If you are a healthcare provider and wish to order a free catalog of patient education materials, please call 1-800-783-9877.
Viral Hepatitis: What it can mean to you?

Viral hepatitis is a liver disease caused by one of several viruses that attack the liver. Hepatitis can affect anyone regardless of his or her age, gender, race or sexual orientation. There are three common forms of viral hepatitis - A, B and C - but other strains - D and E - can occur. It’s important to know the differences between hepatitis A, B and C because any one of these viruses can mean significant health risks for an infected person, especially if they go undetected.

The hepatitis A virus is usually spread from person to person through fecal-oral transmission - that is, putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that over 40,000 new infections occur each year in the U.S. According to the CDC, one-third of Americans have evidence of past infections and are immune to this disease.

The hepatitis B virus is spread by direct contact with blood or body fluids from a hepatitis B-infected person. Hepatitis B is found in infected semen, vaginal fluids and saliva that can be transmitted through vaginal, oral or anal sex. The CDC estimates that about 51,000 Americans are infected annually, and nearly 5,000 people die each year from the disease. CDC also estimates there are 1.25 million chronic cases of hepatitis B in the U.S.

The hepatitis C virus is spread by direct contact with the blood from a hepatitis C-infected person. The CDC estimates that nearly 4 million Americans have been infected with the hepatitis C virus with around 20,000 new infections each year. About 8,000 to 10,000 people in the U.S. die every year from the disease.

Anyone can get viral hepatitis.

Your risk for Hepatitis A is increased if you:

- live with someone who has hepatitis A
- have sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis A
- are a man who has sex with men
- are an injecting and/or non-injecting drug user
- are a native of or travel to areas where hepatitis A is widespread (those areas with high or intermediate levels of hepatitis A include Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and the former Republics of the Soviet Union)
- work or have a child in a daycare setting
- have chronic liver disease or a clotting factor disease, such as hemophilia
- are a worker who handles hepatitis A-infected animals

Your risk for Hepatitis B is increased if you:

- live with someone who has hepatitis B
- have sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis B, have more than one sex partner, or have been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection
- are a man who has sex with men
- are an injecting drug user
- were born to a hepatitis B-infected mother and may have gotten the disease during childbirth
- are a native of, have a parent from, or travel to areas where hepatitis B is widespread (these areas include the Pacific Islands, Africa, Asia, parts of the Middle East, Alaska and the extreme northern region of Canada, southern Greenland and the Amazon region of South America)
- work in a healthcare setting where you may be exposed to hepatitis B-positive blood
- are on hemodialysis

Your risk for Hepatitis C is increased if you:

- are an injecting drug user
- get a tattoo or body piercing where the piercing tools or instruments may have someone else’s blood on them or the artist doesn’t follow good health practices, such as reusing needles
- were born to a hepatitis C-infected mother
- received a blood or blood product transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992, or transfusion from a blood donor who later tested positive for hepatitis C, or clotting factors made before 1987
- work in a healthcare setting where you may be exposed to hepatitis C-positive blood
- have signs or symptoms of liver disease or have unknown liver problems
- are a long-term kidney dialysis patient where you may be at risk for hepatitis C infection by unknowingly sharing supplies or equipment that had someone else’s blood on them

What are the symptoms of viral hepatitis?

Many people with hepatitis A, B or C have no immediate symptoms. When they do get symptoms, some or all of these may show up in an infected person: fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain, dark urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

- On average, once a person is infected with the hepatitis A virus, it takes about 28 days for symptoms to appear. If symptoms develop at all
- It usually takes about 90 days for symptoms to appear for the hepatitis B virus

With hepatitis C, symptoms may develop within six months after infection, if symptoms develop at all

Blood tests for all three forms of viral hepatitis will confirm the presence or absence of the virus or of antibodies to the virus.

What if I’m pregnant?

There is no known danger of transmitting hepatitis A from mother to child during pregnancy or delivery. Hepatitis B or C may be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy or delivery, and there is nothing that can prevent this transmission.

Infants born to mothers infected with the virus should receive hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) and the first hepatitis B vaccine shot within 12 hours after delivery.

Ask your healthcare provider about testing and therapy options for children. Hepatitis C antibody tests should not be done before 18 months of age, as protection given to the baby by the mother may last this long. Other tests that detect the virus directly, rather than antibodies against it, can sometimes be done a few months after birth, however.

How can I protect myself?

Get vaccinated. Vaccines are available for hepatitis A and B. Most infections result from a member of the same household or sex partner who has viral hepatitis. There are other ways you can protect yourself.

To reduce the risk of hepatitis A infection, use good sanitary practices. Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before and after preparing and eating food. Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before you eat them. Contaminated shellfish is also a frequent source of infection; therefore, cook or steam shellfish for at least one minute to kill the virus.

To reduce the risk of hepatitis B infection, tell your sex partner(s) if you have the virus, and consider using latex condoms.

If you shoot drugs, avoid sharing your works (needles, syringes, cookers or cottons) and seek treatment to help you stop. If you are a healthcare worker, always follow routine precautions, such as wearing gloves or masks, and safely handle needles. Cover any cuts or sores.

If you have hepatitis A, B or C, do not donate blood or organs. If you have hepatitis B or C, do not share toothbrushes, razors or other personal care items.