



EPI - NEWS

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COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAM
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HEPATITIS A IMMUNIZATION UPDATE



Hepatitis A is a highly contagious viral disease that attacks the liver and can lead to varying degrees of illness. It is most commonly spread from person to person through the fecal-oral route. It is also commonly transmitted through contaminated food or water. Associated illness may include fever, malaise, jaundice, anorexia, and

nausea. In children under six, infection is usually asymptomatic. If illness does occur, it is not usually accompanied by jaundice. Older children and adults are usually symptomatic, and jaundice occurs in more than 70% of patients. Infection with hepatitis A is not chronic, and recovery from hepatitis A confers lifelong immunity.

Those persons who are at most risk for infection include:

- household contacts of infected persons,
- sexual contacts of infected persons,
- people traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common,
- men who have sex with men,
- injecting/non-injecting drug users, and
- individuals who live in regions of the U.S. where rates of hepatitis A are high.

In Nevada, between 1987 and 1997, the average incidence of reported hepatitis A per year was 21 cases per 100,000 population.

Hygiene is a key factor in the transmission of viruses from children to others. Children often have less than adequate bathroom hygiene, and don't commonly wash hands unless instructed to do so. Thus, children commonly expose others at home, school, preschool, and daycare.

Short-term protection against hepatitis A is available with immune globulin (IG). It can be given before and within 2 weeks after coming into contact with hepatitis A virus. Washoe District Health Department does administer IG to contacts of laboratory-confirmed acute hepatitis A cases. Contacts are not tested for immunity to hepatitis A prior to administration of IG.

Hand washing is the primary way to avoid transmitting hepatitis A. This is especially important after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before preparing and eating food.

Prevention of hepatitis A is best accomplished through vaccination. There are two licensed vaccines that provide similar immunity. One is the Merck vaccine (Vaqta) and the other is the GlaxoSmithKline product (Havrix). Hepatitis A vaccine can be started at age 2. The vaccine is a two-dose series, given 6-12 months apart.

Hepatitis A vaccine has recently become available for children at the Washoe District Health Department Immunization Clinic through the Vaccines For Children (VFC)



program. To be eligible to receive this vaccine a child must be 24-59 months old and meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Medicaid enrolled
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Uninsured (no health insurance of any kind)
- Underinsured (insurance benefits do not cover immunizations)

There is a \$15 fee for administering this vaccine at the WDHD. No child who is eligible will be denied vaccine because of inability to pay the \$15 fee.

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Children who do not meet these guidelines can get vaccine at their pediatrician's office through their own insurance plan, or pay \$27 per dose at the Washoe District Health Department. This includes children above the eligible age range (5-18 years old). Vaccine is also available to adults (19 and up)

who would like to be immunized. The adult vaccine is \$31 per dose.

If you have any questions regarding hepatitis A immunizations, please contact the Immunization Program at 328-3724.

CLARIFICATION OF SERVICES OFFERED BY WASHOE DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Services **offered** by Washoe District Health Department related to hepatitis include:

- immune globulin for contacts of laboratory-confirmed acute hepatitis A cases,
- low-cost hepatitis A vaccinations for children who meet one or more of the VFC criteria listed above,
- regular cost hepatitis A vaccinations for children and adults who do not meet the VFC criteria,
- low-cost hepatitis B vaccinations for children (0-18 years of age) and for household contacts to persons with chronic hepatitis B infection, and
- low-cost hepatitis B testing for household contacts to persons with chronic hepatitis B infection.

Services **not** offered by Washoe District Health Department related to hepatitis include:

- testing for immunity to hepatitis A,
- testing for hepatitis C infection,
- comprehensive hepatitis testing for persons with risk factors for hepatitis or who have had exposure to an unknown type of hepatitis, and
- free hepatitis A & B vaccinations for persons with chronic hepatitis (the Immunization Clinic may be able to bill Medicaid for these services if the client has a current Medicaid card).

If you have any questions regarding hepatitis testing, please contact the Communicable Disease Program at 328-2447.