



HEPATITIS

What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is a serious condition in which the liver becomes inflamed as a result of a viral infection. Hepatitis can be acute or chronic, depending on the type of hepatitis contracted. There are at least five different types of viral hepatitis, named Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E. The Hepatitis B, C and D viruses can lead to chronic hepatitis, which is a prolonged form of hepatitis, sometimes even lifelong. Symptoms of hepatitis include jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), weariness and abdominal pain, but some people will not experience any symptoms.

What are the Different Forms of Hepatitis?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease that is spread to people living in close contact or drinking/eating products contaminated with the feces of an infected person. This form of hepatitis is preventable through vaccination. Hepatitis E is also spread through the oral-fecal route. Hepatitis E is uncommon in the United States, and the only way to prevent it is to avoid drinking contaminated water when traveling internationally.

Hepatitis B virus is found in the blood and other body fluids of infected individuals. This virus can be spread when blood or body fluid from an infected individual enters the body of an individual who is not immune to this virus. There is a vaccine for protection against the Hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis D is a virus that is spread through blood and body fluid contact, but is only found in those individuals already infected with Hepatitis B. To protect individuals from this virus, it is best for individuals to receive immunizations to prevent a Hepatitis B infection. Hepatitis C virus is another virus that is spread through blood and bodily fluids, often associated with sharing needles in illegal drug use. Hepatitis C is not preventable through immunization.

How Can I Prevent Hepatitis?

There are vaccines available for both Hepatitis A and B. The Hepatitis A vaccine is inactivated, which means that there is “dead” virus within the vaccine and it cannot cause the disease. Following vaccination, the body is able to recognize the virus and fight it off. It is a two-dose vaccine, so a second dose is given six

months after the first. All children should have this vaccine beginning at one year of age.

There are also vaccines against the Hepatitis B virus. These vaccines are also “dead” and contain a recognizable portion of the outside of the Hepatitis B virus. Again, upon exposure to the virus, the body recognizes it and can fight it off. The Hepatitis B vaccine is given in a three-dose series over a six-month period (the second and third doses are given one month and six months after the first dose). This particular vaccination series is started immediately after a baby is born.

Who Should Receive Hepatitis Vaccines?

Children and Adolescents

- All children should be vaccinated against Hepatitis B immediately after birth.
- All children should receive Hepatitis A vaccine beginning at 12 months of age.
- Older children should receive a Hepatitis A vaccine if they have a chronic liver infection or are going to travel to an area where Hepatitis A is common.

Adults

- Any adult with a chronic liver infection should be vaccinated against both Hepatitis A and B.
- Anyone wishing to obtain immunity from hepatitis should be immunized.
- Hepatitis B vaccine is indicated for high-risk individuals, including injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, patients requiring dialysis, people exposed to blood products, healthcare workers and individuals recently diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease.
- Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for people traveling internationally, especially if visiting places other than the United States, Western Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Japan.

Hepatitis A vaccine is indicated for high-risk individuals, including people who use drugs, men who have sex with men, people with clotting disorders, individuals who work with the virus and some food handlers.

For more information, ask your pharmacist!

This information provided by the Michigan Pharmacists Association and:

