

Hepatitis A / HAV

What is it? - Hepatitis A/HA is a very contagious liver infection that lives in the stool and blood of people who are infected and can live outside of the body for several months. HAV can be prevented by getting vaccinated.¹

Why is it important that people who use drugs get vaccinated for Hepatitis A? - Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease. Most people have symptoms that clear up within a few weeks, but sometimes the virus can cause long lasting liver damage, liver failure or death.

People who use drugs (PWUD) are more likely to catch Hepatitis A Virus than the general population if the person who is using is boofing or injecting.

Maine is one of nine states that has a current Hepatitis A outbreak. Since the Outbreak began in 2019, 279 people have been infected with the virus, making PWUD and PWID even more at risk of contracting the virus here in Maine.²

Symptoms: - Not everyone who contracts Hepatitis A Virus will show symptoms. Adults are more likely to develop symptoms than children. The virus usually takes 2 to 7 weeks from time of transmission until symptoms show.

Symptoms can include:

- Yellow skin or eyes
- Not wanting to eat
- Upset stomach
- Throwing up
- Stomach pain

- Fever
- Dark urine or light-colored stools
- Diarrhea
- Joint pain
- Feeling tired

Transmission: - HAV is usually spread when someone who has the virus doesn't wash their hands properly after using the bathroom and then touches food, another object, or someone's mouth.. HAV can also be passed by close contact between people such as sexual partners, sharing unsterile smoking utensils, or using unsterile needles when injecting.

People with HAV can be contagious for a period of time before and after symptoms and also while experiencing symptoms. Age is a primary factor of whether someone will show symptoms of the disease or not.

Other routes of transmission can include but are not limited to:

- **Close person to person contact** (such as certain sexual contact like oral to anal, caring for someone who is ill with the virus, or sharing works)
- **Eating contaminated food or drinks.** This is more common in countries with a higher prevalence of Hepatitis A, but transmission does happen that way within the U.S.

Places where it is harder to follow hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly (especially after using the bathroom) or places that have

¹"Hepatitis A." 2022. Centers For Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm>.

²"Widespread outbreaks of hepatitis A across the U.S. | CDC." 2022. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/2017March-HepatitisA.htm>.

unsanitary conditions have higher rates of HAV spread.³

Vaccination: - It's recommended that all children between the ages of 12 months to 18 years and any adult wishing to be vaccinated get vaccinated.

The vaccine is typically given as a series of 2 shots, with the second being at least 6 months after the first (in rare cases infants 6-11 months can be vaccinated with a single dose and receive the series of 2 shots later at the appropriate age).

Adults can also receive a 3 dose combination HEP A and HEP B vaccine given at 0, 1, and 6 months.

One dose of single-antigen HAV vaccine can be effective for outbreak control and leads to a protective response in 95% of healthy individuals for up to 11 years. Two doses given at least 6 months apart provide life-long immunity.⁴

Where can I go to get vaccinated against Hep A? - If you have insurance and a primary care provider you can ask them about being vaccinated:

If you have insurance (including Mainecare) you can go to most pharmacies and be vaccinated without a prescription.

If you do not have insurance or are underinsured you can find a provider that can offer Hepatitis A vaccines free of charge by going to:

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/immunization/active-317-a-dult-provider-sites.shtml>

If you need assistance with or have questions about getting vaccinated or getting help with linkage to care please reach out to:

MAP's Director of Health Services,
Anna McConnell
call/text/signal 207-319-8079

³ "What is Hepatitis A - FAQ | CDC." 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/afaq.htm>.
⁴ Savoy, Margot L., and Lewis Katz. 2022. "Hepatitis A (HepA) Vaccine - Infectious Diseases." Merck Manuals. <https://www.merckmanuals.com/professional/infectious-diseases/immunization/hepatitis-a-hepa-vaccine>.

Other Information About Local Vaccine Access:

- ★ All adult vaccinations are available at Hannaford pharmacies without a prescription from a provider (Tetanus, MMR, HPV, Hep. A, Hep. B, Shingles, Pneumonia, Flu).
- ★ Only Flu vaccinations are available at Walgreens pharmacies without a prescription from a provider.
- ★ All pharmacies accept Mainecare, and the cost of vaccines may vary with other insurances.
- ★ Access to vaccinations at pharmacies may differ depending on location and it may be helpful to call ahead.

References

"Hepatitis A." 2022. Centers For Disease Control and Prevention.
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