



Hepatitis A&B Vaccine

THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

What is Hepatitis A? What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B are vaccine preventable diseases that cause infection and inflammation in the liver.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of Hepatitis A can last up to two months and include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and jaundice. Hepatitis B can cause an acute illness that has the potential to persist long-term (chronic) and cause cirrhosis or liver cancer.

How are they transmitted?

Hepatitis A can be transmitted through any sexual contact with an infected person, including oral-anal contact (“rimming”). It can also be spread by eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Hepatitis B is transmitted through exchange of blood, semen, or other bodily fluids.

Can they be cured?

While Hepatitis A is self-resolving with low rates of mortality, average hospitalization rates in the U.S due to Hepatitis A are above 60%. Most who become infected with Hepatitis B as adults completely recover within 4 to 8 weeks, but about 1 in 20 adults who contract Hepatitis B become carriers and have chronic Hepatitis B infection.

Why should gay and bisexual men and transgender women care in particular?

Hepatitis vaccines are available and accessible yet many gay and bisexual men – especially gay and bisexual men of color – are unvaccinated. Hepatitis A and B rates in the US remain disproportionately high among gay and bisexual men, indicating a lack of vaccine use.

Prevalence and recent trends, racial and ethnic disparities, age cohort disparities

According to the CDC, about 10% of new Hepatitis A cases and 20% of new Hepatitis B cases each year occur among gay and bisexual men. Among those being diagnosed with Hepatitis B, Black non-Hispanic and White non-Hispanic individuals have the highest rates of infection, followed by American Indian/Alaska Natives. Hispanic and Black transgender women have a much higher incidence of Hepatitis B compared to White counterparts. One 2009 study of transgender women living in New York City found high rates lifetime Hepatitis B infection among Hispanic (36%) and Black (35.5%) women compared to White (6.5%) women.

Sexual risk reduction approaches

Hepatitis A can be transmitted through any kind of sexual contact, especially between two men, and not only through oral-fecal contact (“rimming”). Hepatitis B is also frequently sexually transmitted. For this reason, the CDC recommends that all sexually active MSM be vaccinated against Hepatitis A&B. Given similar STI risk burden for transgender women, we believe that sexually active transgender women should also be vaccinated against Hepatitis A&B. In addition, it is important for those living with HIV to be vaccinated for all preventable infections to safeguard the immune system. If one is HIV negative, and considering or on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a medication used to help prevent HIV, it is also important to ensure immunity to Hepatitis A&B and prevent HIV. It is recommended that all people living with HIV or on HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis be vaccinated for both Hepatitis A and B.

Good news: there are vaccines to protect yourself!

How can I get a vaccine?

Call your doctor or your nearest community health center, or contact a commercial pharmacy. All of these can vaccinate you against Hepatitis A&B.

Are there any side effects?

The most common side effects are usually mild and last just a day or two. They include: swelling, tenderness, or redness where the shot was given; low fever; general ill feeling; nausea; headache; loss of appetite.

Will insurance cover it?

For high-risk individuals, including MSM, insurance will usually cover Hepatitis A&B vaccination.

I was vaccinated many years ago. Should I get vaccinated again?

It depends! It is important to check with a clinician to see if you have immunity to hepatitis A and B, or if you require a repeat in vaccination as this immunity can wane over time.



For more information on Hepatitis A&B vaccination and LGBTQ+ people please go to:
www.fenwayhealth.org/hepatitisA&B