

## FACTSHEET: HEPATITIS A – LOCAL RISKS

### HEPATITIS A – LOCAL RISKS

The hepatitis A vaccine (HAV) is the best way to protect against hepatitis A infection. In BC, hepatitis A vaccine can be obtained through Public Health programs or privately. Hepatitis A vaccine is provided at no cost for high risk groups (including Aboriginal children 6 months to 18 years of age) and in emergency outbreak situations.<sup>1</sup>

Hepatitis A vaccine is often thought of as a travel vaccine only, but the hepatitis A virus can be transmitted in any time or place. Why is this?

- Hepatitis A virus can easily survive in the environment and may be found on countertops used as change areas, kitchen countertops and other surfaces. Infections can be carried for 1 month in ambient temperature.<sup>2</sup>
- Food service facilities may not enforce proper food handling practices.
- Fruits and vegetables may not be peeled or washed well before serving.
- Babysitters, caregivers or anyone caring for your child may not have been immunized against hepatitis A and may be carriers.

Children and youth living or travelling in developing countries, particularly in rural areas are also at risk of hepatitis A infection. See BCPS Factsheet [Travel Vaccines – Enterically Borne](#).



### Disease and Incidence

The hepatitis A virus is a single serotype, ribonucleic acid (RNA) virus of the Picornaviridae family. The virus is most frequently transmitted by the fecal-oral route, through direct contact with infected people or indirectly through ingestion of contaminated water or foods.<sup>3</sup> For every 1,000 people infected, 1 to 3 will die.<sup>1</sup>

Hepatitis A infection is often asymptomatic in children.<sup>4</sup> Once exposed to the virus, it takes 2-7 weeks to produce hepatitis A symptoms and with poor hygiene practices the virus can be passed on to others during the incubation period.<sup>5</sup> Hepatitis A may range in severity from a mild illness lasting 1–2 weeks or lead to more serious illness in a small number of people.<sup>4,5</sup>

Since the introduction of hepatitis A vaccine in Canada in 1996:

- The number of cases of HA reported annually has declined from 2,978 (1991) to 298 (2008), (10.6 and 0.9 per 100,000 population, respectively).
- Age specific-incidence is highest among those 5 to 9 years old with a rate of 2.1 per 100,000, followed by those aged 1 to 4 years (1.5 per 100,000 population).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HealthLink BC File #33 Hepatitis A Vaccine [updated January 2014]. Retrieved January 5, 2015 from: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile33.stm>

<sup>2</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Hepatitis A Virus Pathogen Safety Data Sheet. 2011. Retrieved March 31, 2015 from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/lab-bio/res/psds-ftss/hepa-eng.php>

<sup>3</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada, Immunization and Vaccines. Canadian Immunization Guide. Hepatitis A Vaccine. Retrieved January 5, 2015 from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/cig-gci/p04-hepa-eng.php>

<sup>4</sup> CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Yellow Book. Chapter 3 Infectious Diseases Related To Travel. Retrieved March 31, 2015 from: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2014/chapter-3-infectious-diseases-related-to-travel/hepatitis-a>

<sup>5</sup> Patient.co.uk. [Internet]. Leeds, England. Health Information. Hepatitis A. Accessed April 8, 2015 from: <http://www.patient.co.uk/health/hepatitis-a-leaflet>



### Vaccines

The hepatitis A vaccine is recommended - but unfortunately not provided for free - for all children. Consider recommending non-publicly funded (NPF) hepatitis A vaccine for children or youth who are not covered by the provincial program.

Hepatitis A vaccines are interchangeable for children or adults at any scheduled dose, using the age-specific dosage for the particular product<sup>6</sup>: Avaxim Pediatric<sup>®</sup>/Avaxim<sup>®</sup> (over 12), Havrix Junior<sup>®</sup>/Havrix<sup>®</sup> (over 16) and Vaqta<sup>®</sup> (pediatric dose).

Non-publicly funded vaccines for hepatitis A may be available in three locations: pharmacies, travel clinics or offices of physicians. Please refer parents to the BC Pediatric Society resource [NPF Vaccines: Access](#) for the steps to follow to obtain hepatitis A vaccine from their pharmacist for you to administer in your office.

**“Study after study shows that patients trust their doctors’ advice on vaccination more than they trust anyone else on this topic. Yes, they talk to their family and friends – and they see some celebrities broadcast their views through the media – but when it comes to the crunch, they listen to their doctor.”<sup>8</sup>**



### TAKE AWAY FOR PARENT DISCUSSION

- The hepatitis A virus can be found and transmitted in any time and any place.
- It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get hepatitis A.
- Vaccination against hepatitis A can offer lifetime protection against the disease.

**One of the most important questions on a parent’s mind about vaccines is:**

**“What is your recommendation as a health care provider?”**

**Visit the BC Pediatric Society website for Immunization Information for Physicians and for Families at**

**[www.bcpeds.ca](http://www.bcpeds.ca)**



*Please note that the information in this document is provided for educational purposes only, is not intended to provide medical advice and should in no way replace clinical judgment of the healthcare professional.*

<sup>6</sup> BCCDC Manual 2013, Communicable Disease Control Immunization Program Section VII – Biological Products, <http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/comm-manual/CDManualChap2.htm>

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization. Media Center. Factsheets. Hepatitis A. Accessed March 31, 2015 from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs328/en/>

<sup>8</sup> Vaccines Today The Blog. February 15, 2015 (Gary Finnegan editor). [Internet] Brussels, Belgium. [Quote]. Accessed April 8, 2015 from: <http://www.vaccines.today.eu/vaccines/how-should-doctors-communicate-about-immunisation/>