

# Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B Vaccine

**Vaccines have saved more lives in Canada in the last 60 years than any other medical intervention. Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.**

**Hepatitis A and B are vaccine preventable diseases.**

**Hepatitis A (HA)** is a virus that infects the liver. For every 1,000 people infected, 1 to 3 could die. In adults 50 years and older, 18 out of 1,000 cases can die.

- There is no known cure or specific treatment for HA infection as it is a self-limiting disease. 25% of adults with HA are hospitalized.
- HA is spread through the fecal-oral route:
  - By ingesting contaminated food or water (e.g., through food preparation by infected food handlers);
  - From direct person-to-person contact; or
  - From contamination of the environment or objects (e.g., on counter tops and on dishes) as the HA virus may remain infectious in the environment for several weeks.
- People who eat or drink with or use the same bathrooms as a person who is infectious with HA are at high risk of becoming infected themselves.
- HA can be spread by sexual contact or through sharing of equipment used for drug use such as straws or pipes.

**Hepatitis B (HB)** is a virus that infects the liver and can cause permanent scarring and damage (cirrhosis), liver cancer and death.

- The HB virus is found in the body fluids of infected persons (for example, blood, semen, vaginal fluids and saliva). Many new HB cases occur in early adulthood.
- HB is spread:
  - By sharing personal items like razors, toothbrushes and dental floss.
  - By reusing and/or sharing equipment used for tattooing, piercings, acupuncture or needles/equipment used to inject drugs or other substances (e.g. steroids).
  - By being poked with an infected needle.
  - Through unprotected sexual activity.
  - From an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy or delivery.

**What are the symptoms of HA?**

- The time between becoming infected and developing symptoms is 15 to 50 days.
- Symptoms usually last from 1-2 weeks, but may last for months and include:
  - Fatigue, fever, loss of appetite and nausea.
  - Jaundice (yellow colouring of the skin and whites of the eyes).
  - Dark-colour urine and light colour stools.
- Some infected persons may not develop any symptoms but can still spread the HA virus.
- Cases are infectious 2 weeks before they start developing symptoms and for 1 week after developing jaundice.

**What are symptoms of HB?**

- After the HB virus enters the body, it usually takes 2 to 3 months to develop signs of illness such as:
  - Tiredness and fever;
  - Loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting;
  - Pain in the upper abdomen (stomach area);
  - Jaundice (a yellow colouring of the skin and the whites of the eyes); and/or
  - Dark coloured urine and light coloured stools.
- About 50% of adults and 90% of children who are infected with HB do not have symptoms.
- Treatment does not provide a cure.
- The HB virus may remain in the blood and body fluids of some infected people. They are 'chronic carriers'.

**How can HA and HB be prevented?**

- Be immunized. When you / your child get immunized, you help protect others as well.
- Practice good hygiene (e.g. handwashing).
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have and always use a condom during sexual activity.
- Avoid sharing personal items, needles and equipment used for tattooing and piercings.

## Who can get this vaccine for free?

- Individuals with chronic liver disease (including cirrhosis, hepatitis C infection).
- Individuals with bleeding disorders, including those who receive repeated infusions of blood or blood products or plasma-derived replacement clotting factors.
- Liver transplant candidates or recipients.
- Stem cell transplant recipients.
- Those who use or share illicit drug snorting, smoking or injection equipment.
- Men who have sex with men.

## Who should not receive this vaccine?

- **A mild illness, with or without fever, is not a reason to avoid immunizations.**
- Persons who have a serious illness, with or without a fever, should delay immunizations.
- People who had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of a HA or HB-containing vaccine, or any components of the vaccine.
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should be given the vaccine only if clearly necessary.

## What are common reactions to this vaccine?

- **Vaccines are very safe and effective. It is much safer to get this vaccine than to get these serious diseases.**  
Temporary pain, redness and swelling at the injection site.
- Headache and fatigue; irritability in children.
- Fever, nausea and vomiting.
- These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempra) may be given for fever or soreness. ASA (Aspirin) must NOT be given to anyone younger than 18 years old because of the risk of Reye syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. **If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 911 or the local emergency number.** This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in one million people who get the vaccine.

**For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner, HealthLine online or by calling 811.**

## Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor, or nurse practitioner as soon as possible.

## Talk to a public health nurse:

- If you have questions or concerns about your or your child's reaction to an immunization.
- If you had to take your child to a doctor, a hospital or to a health centre with a symptom that might be related to immunization.

## What does this vaccine contain?

**Twinrix®** and **Twinrix® Junior** contain purified, inactivated hepatitis A virus and purified hepatitis B surface antigen, aluminum hydroxide, aluminum phosphate, sodium chloride, water and amino acids for injection, formaldehyde, neomycin sulphate and polysorbate 20. May contain traces of yeast. Thimerosal-free. Latex-free.

## Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents/guardians discuss consent for immunization with their children. Efforts are first made to get parental/guardian consent for immunizations. However, children at least 13 years of age up to and including 17 years of age, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risks of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations in Saskatchewan by providing mature minor informed consent to a healthcare provider.

To ensure that a complete immunization record is maintained, every immunization administered to an individual will be documented by Public Health into the electronic provincial immunization registry, known as Panorama. Panorama is a secure electronic system used in Saskatchewan to record and manage immunization records and the health information related to immunization for all Saskatchewan residents. Immunization records may be shared with other health care professionals to provide public health services; assist with diagnosis and treatment; and to control the spread of vaccine preventable diseases. Information about Panorama is detailed in the "Protecting the Privacy of Your Immunization Record" fact sheet.

Reference: Twinrix® product monograph (2016).