

Frequently Asked Hepatitis Vaccine Questions:

Vaccination Against Hepatitis

The easiest way to protect against hepatitis A and hepatitis B is by vaccination. In fact, hepatitis A and hepatitis B are not just diseases but also STDs which are vaccine preventable, and hepatitis B is the only cancer-causing disease among men which is preventable by vaccination.

What is the vaccination schedule?

There are individual vaccines against hepatitis A and hepatitis B. And there's a combination vaccine which protects against both hepatitis A and hepatitis B (The combination vaccine is called Twinrix™ and is a product of GSK Pharmaceuticals)

Talk to your healthcare provider to choose the option that's right for you:

- If you are already protected against hepatitis A, you only need the vaccine against hepatitis B (3 doses over a 6-month period)
- If you are already protected against hepatitis B, you only need the vaccine against hepatitis A (2 doses over a 6- to 18-month period)

If you are not yet protected against either hepatitis A or hepatitis B, you may choose a combination vaccine

- 3 doses over a 6-month period
- or
- three doses over a 21- to 30-day period with a fourth dose a year later

Once you've completed a vaccination series, there are no recommendations for booster shots.

I think I started the Vaccinations but I didn't finish it, Can I still get it?

If you started but did not complete a hepatitis vaccination series you can and should finish it without repeating doses. If in doubt talk to your local county health department vaccine clinic or your healthcare provider about your options.

REMEMBER -There is no vaccine against Hepatitis C at this time.

Does the vaccine have any side effects?

The vaccines against hepatitis A and hepatitis B have an established safety record with millions of doses administered worldwide. The vaccines themselves do not contain live virus and cannot infect you with hepatitis.

The most common side effects may include:

- soreness at the injection site,
- headache,
- fatigue.

Most side effects rarely last longer than 48 hours.

You are encouraged to report vaccine adverse events to the US Department of Health and Human Services. Visit <http://www.vaers.hhs.gov> to file a report, or call 1-800-822-7967.

Are the vaccines effective?

When given according to the approved schedule, the vaccines against hepatitis A and hepatitis B are highly effective.

What if I've already had hepatitis?

If you've had hepatitis A or hepatitis B you may already be protected against infection from the hepatitis viruses. If you're not sure whether or not you're already immune, your doctor can perform a blood test.

Since hepatitis A and hepatitis B are caused by different viruses, immunity against one does not give you immunity against the other. Vaccination against hepatitis A does not protect against hepatitis B, or vice versa.

Where do I go for hepatitis vaccination?

Vaccination against hepatitis A and hepatitis B is widely available and often covered by insurance. You should contact your regular healthcare provider or local county health department about vaccination.

What if I'm HIV-positive?

Hepatitis A and hepatitis B may have more serious consequences for someone whose immune system is already compromised. Hepatitis infection, which puts stress on the liver, may also necessitate a break in taking HIV drugs.

There is also some evidence that, in persons who are HIV-positive, hepatitis B is more likely to become chronic (lifelong), with symptoms which can include liver damage, liver cancer, or death.

The CDC recommend vaccination against hepatitis B for all persons who are HIV-positive and recommend vaccination against hepatitis A for all persons who are HIV-positive who are at increased risk for the disease.

What if I have Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis A and hepatitis B may have more serious consequences for someone whose health is already compromised because of chronic disease issues. Hepatitis C infection, which puts stress on the liver, has the potential to become even more severe by contracting Hepatitis A or B at the same time.