HEPATITIS A & B Vaccination

How do vaccinations work?
Vaccines work by causing your body to produce antibodies against the virus. These antibodies will protect you if you are ever exposed in the future. You cannot get hepatitis A or hepatitis B from the vaccines.

Do I need to get vaccinated for HAV or HBV?
Vaccination for hepatitis B virus (HBV) wasn't routine for children in the US until 1999, and vaccination for hepatitis A virus (HAV) wasn't routine for children until 2006. This means a lot of the US population is still not vaccinated. People from countries without routine childhood immunization for HAV and HBV may also not be vaccinated.

Any unvaccinated adult who is at an increased risk for exposure to either HAV or HBV should get vaccinated. According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, this includes anyone in a correctional facility. People with other chronic disease such as hepatitis C, HIV, or diabetes should also get vaccinated.

See hepatitis A and hepatitis B handouts for a further explanation of risk factors for exposure.

What if I don't know if I've been vaccinated?
If you aren't sure if you've received the HAV or HBV vaccine before, the infection prevention nurse can look it up for you in a Washington State database.

If you aren't from Washington, don’t worry! It’s also perfectly safe to get vaccinated again. Sometimes it is also possible to get a blood test to see if you are immune to HAV and/or HBV due to being vaccinated or having these infections previously.

How do I get vaccinated in Washington DOC?
All you have to do is send a paper or electronic medical kit to the infection prevention nurse and let them know that you’d like the HAV and/or HBV vaccine. It helps to be specific. You can also request that they look up your records to see if you need the vaccine.

The vaccination itself is usually a series of three shots spaced out over six months or more. The second shot would come one month after the first, and the next one would come five months after that. However, there is no harm in spacing them out more, and they will still be effective.

Washington DOC usually has the Twinrix vaccination available, which will protect you against both HAV and HBV if you need to be vaccinated for both. This reduces the number of shots you have to get! However, you can also get vaccinated for just HAV or HBV if you don’t need both.

How much does it cost?
There is no co-pay for infection prevention services, including testing and vaccinations. This includes the HAV and HBV vaccines.

Are there side effects to the vaccines?
Most people do not have side effects when they get vaccinated. If they do, side effects are generally very mild and may include soreness at the site where you got the shot, or a mild fever. Serious side effects are very rare, but ask the doctor or nurse if you have any concerns.

What about my friends and family on the outside who want to get vaccinated? What if I have more questions?
Hepatitis Education Project does vaccinations! We are also happy to answer questions you have that are related to these vaccinations or infections disease risks and testing.

You can mail us at:
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