

Men who have sex with men are at increased risk of becoming infected with both the hepatitis B virus and the hepatitis A virus. Although these viruses can be transmitted in different ways, both can be spread through sexual activity.

Hepatitis is a serious disease that can be fatal. Fortunately, both hepatitis B and hepatitis A can be prevented by safe and effective vaccines. Unfortunately, many men at risk remain unprotected.

#### How great is my risk of getting a hepatitis infection?

Men who have sex with men are 10 to 15 times more likely to acquire the hepatitis B virus than the general population.

Among adults, an estimated 20% of new hepatitis B cases and 10% of new hepatitis A cases occur in gay or bisexual men.



#### Will hepatitis B or hepatitis A vaccine protect me from hepatitis C?

No. Hepatitis A, B, and C are all different viruses. The hepatitis C virus is spread through blood, and although it can be transmitted through sexual contact, it is most commonly acquired through sharing of drug needles for injection drug use. Unfortunately, there is no hepatitis C vaccine at this time.

For more information on STDs, HIV, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C

Call your health care provider, your local health department or contact



at

[www.health.mo.gov/viralhepatitis](http://www.health.mo.gov/viralhepatitis)  
[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis)

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# Protect Yourself Against Hepatitis B and Hepatitis A



A Brochure for  
Gay and  
Bisexual Men

## How are hepatitis B virus and hepatitis A virus spread?

A man infected with hepatitis B virus can spread the virus to another person by:

- ◆ Having unprotected anal or vaginal sex
- ◆ Sharing needles for drugs, piercings or tattooing
- ◆ Allowing his blood or open sores to come in contact with another person's blood or open sores
- ◆ Sharing toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, etc

The hepatitis B virus can also be spread by living in a household with a chronically infected person. The hepatitis B virus is NOT spread by sharing eating utensils, hugging, kissing, hand holding, coughing or sneezing.

Hepatitis A virus is usually transmitted from particles of fecal material, for example, by eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or during sex.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis B and hepatitis A?

The symptoms of both diseases are similar: extreme tiredness, nausea, fever, dark urine, bloated and tender belly, and yellowish-tinged skin and eyes. Infected persons can have no symptoms at all or be extremely ill. However, people who are infected with hepatitis B virus or hepatitis A virus can spread the disease to others, whether they have symptoms or not.

## Do people fully recover from hepatitis B virus and hepatitis A virus infections?

Most adults recover from hepatitis B virus infection after several months and are no longer contagious. Unfortunately, about 5% of adults who become infected with hepatitis B virus will carry the virus in their bodies for years and remain infectious. Chronically infected people usually do not have symptoms, but are at increased risk for eventual liver failure and liver cancer and need ongoing medical care. An estimated 800,000 to 1.4 million people in the U.S. are chronically infected.

Although hepatitis A virus does not result in chronic infection, infected people can become very sick and sometimes die.

## Protecting Yourself Against Hepatitis B and Hepatitis A...

### How serious are hepatitis B and hepatitis A virus infections?

Becoming infected with hepatitis B virus or hepatitis A virus can have a major impact on a person's life. A person might be too sick to work or to go to the gym for months, and should not drink alcohol. Hepatitis B virus and hepatitis A virus infection can have serious consequences for people with HIV, as their immune systems might be compromised.

Hepatitis B virus infection can cause serious liver disease, including liver failure and liver cancer. More than 5,000 people in the U.S. die every year from hepatitis B-related liver disease.

There are approximately 100 deaths each year in the U.S. from hepatitis A. About 15% of people with hepatitis A require hospitalization. Adults who become ill are often out of work for several weeks.

### How can I protect myself from hepatitis B virus infection?

- ◆ Get the hepatitis B vaccination
- ◆ Tell your friends at risk to get vaccinated

### How can I protect myself from hepatitis A virus infection?

- ◆ Get the hepatitis A vaccination
- ◆ Tell your friends at risk to get vaccinated

### How do I know if I have or have had hepatitis B virus or hepatitis A virus infection?

The only way to know for sure is to have your blood tested.

### Should I have my blood tested before getting vaccinated?

Discuss this with your doctor to decide if it is appropriate to perform blood tests first. If you have already been infected with hepatitis B virus or hepatitis A virus, getting the vaccines will not help or hurt you.

### How many shots do I need to be protected against hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B virus infections?

The hepatitis B vaccine series consists of three doses spaced out over approximately 6 months.

The hepatitis A series consists of 2 doses given at 6 to 18 months apart. If you started either series but didn't get all the doses, you should continue where you left off.

A combined hepatitis B and hepatitis A vaccine has been developed for adults who need protection against both hepatitis B virus and hepatitis A virus infections. This vaccine consists of three doses given over a 6-month period.

### Are these shots safe? Do they have side effects?

Both hepatitis B and hepatitis A vaccines have been proven to be safe. Since 1995, more than 15 million doses of hepatitis A vaccine have been given in the U.S. with no reports of serious health problems linked to the vaccine. Side effects might include soreness at the injection site, headache and fatigue.

### Are these shots effective?

Yes. After three doses of hepatitis B vaccine, at least 90% of healthy young adults develop immunity to hepatitis B virus infection. Immune-compromised people might not respond as well to hepatitis B vaccine. They should be tested 1-2 months after the third dose of vaccine to see if they responded.

Almost 100% of people are protected from hepatitis A virus infection after getting two doses of hepatitis A vaccine.

**EVERYONE NEEDS VACCINATIONS!!**