

Hepatitis A Vaccine

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious virus that affects the liver, causing inflammation and damage. It spreads primarily through contaminated food and water or through close contact with an infected person. In South Africa, where access to clean water and sanitation can vary in different regions, vaccination against Hepatitis A is an important way to protect yourself and your family.

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a viral infection that attacks the liver. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and may include:

- **Fatigue**
- **Fever**
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Jaundice** (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- **Abdominal pain**
- **Dark urine**

Not everyone who gets infected with Hepatitis A will have symptoms, but the virus can still be spread to others. While most people recover completely from Hepatitis A within a few weeks to a few months, the disease can sometimes cause severe liver damage, especially in older adults or those with pre-existing liver conditions.

How Does Hepatitis A Spread?

Hepatitis A is usually spread through the **faecal-oral route**. This means that if someone consumes food or water contaminated with the faeces of an infected person, they can become infected. The virus can also spread through close personal contact, such as caring for someone who is infected, or through sexual contact.

In areas with poor sanitation, the risk of Hepatitis A infection is higher. Even in areas with good sanitation, outbreaks can occur if contaminated food or water is consumed. This makes vaccination a crucial preventive measure, especially for those living or traveling to regions where Hepatitis A is more common.

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Why Should You Get the Hepatitis A Vaccine?

The **Hepatitis A vaccine** is the most effective way to prevent infection. It helps your immune system create antibodies to fight the virus if you're ever exposed to it. In South Africa, vaccination is particularly important for:

- **Children**, as they may not show symptoms but can still spread the virus.
- **People traveling** to areas with poor sanitation.
- **Healthcare workers** or anyone at risk of close contact with infected individuals.
- **People with chronic liver conditions**, as Hepatitis A can cause severe liver damage in these individuals.

When Should You Get the Hepatitis A Vaccine?

The **Hepatitis A vaccine** is given in two doses. The first dose provides protection after about **two to four weeks**. A second dose, given six to twelve months after the first, provides long-term protection that can last for up to 20 years or more.

The vaccine is safe and highly effective. It's recommended for children over the age of **12 months** as part of routine immunisation. Adults who are at risk or traveling to high-risk areas should also consider getting vaccinated.

Is the Hepatitis A Vaccine Safe?

Yes, the **Hepatitis A vaccine** is very safe. Millions of people worldwide have received the vaccine, and serious side effects are rare. Common, mild side effects include:

- **Soreness** at the injection site
- **Mild fever**
- **Headache**

These side effects usually go away within a day or two. If you are concerned about any reactions, consult your healthcare provider.

References:

1. [South African Department of Health](#)

