

Hepatitis A Information for Healthcare Workers



Hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection causes an acute, contagious liver disease. The virus is found in the stool of infected persons and is usually transmitted person to person through the fecal-oral route (close personal contact with an infected household member or sex partner) or by consuming food or water contaminated with the virus.

Healthcare workers are not at increased risk for HAV infection. If a patient with HAV is admitted to the hospital, routine infection control precautions are sufficient to prevent transmission to hospital staff as well as other patients.

PREVENTION

Healthcare facilities can take a proactive role in preventing HAV exposures. Standard healthcare facility cleaning policies should be sufficient against HAV.

1. Strict adherence to Standard Precautions will prevent the transmission of HAV. Ensure all employees adhere to appropriate infection control at all times and utilize appropriate hygienic practices, including washing hands thoroughly with soap and water and using gloves as appropriate.
2. Implement and adhere to policies ensuring sick employees stay home.
3. Advise employees wanting protection against HAV to contact their healthcare provider regarding vaccination.

POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEP)

When a patient with HAV is admitted to a healthcare facility, staff should not routinely be administered PEP; instead, strict adherence to standard infection control should be emphasized. However, if it is determined that HAV has been spread among patients or between patients and staff, PEP should be administered to unvaccinated/non-immune persons who have had close contact (i.e., potential fecal-oral contamination) with an infected person.

PEP (administration of HAV vaccine or immune globulin [IG]), if indicated, should be administered as soon as possible, within two weeks after exposure.

TESTING

Testing of asymptomatic persons, including healthcare workers, is not recommended. (Exception: Hawaii State law requires contacts* who are food handlers be tested and have a negative HAV IgM test before returning to work).

CONTACTS* OF CASES

Healthcare workers who have been identified as contacts of a case are recommended to:

1. Consult their healthcare provider about the possibility of receiving PEP;
2. Monitor their health for symptoms of HAV infection up to 50 days after exposure;
3. Utilize appropriate hygienic practices at all times; and
4. If symptoms of HAV infection develop, stay at home and contact their healthcare provider immediately.

RESOURCES

More information about hepatitis A:

Hawaii Department of Health: <http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/updates-and-resources-for-clinicians/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HAV/HAVfaq.htm>

More information about infection control: <http://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/pdf/isolation/Isolation2007.pdf>

*A contact of a case is defined as:

- All unvaccinated household members
- All unvaccinated sexual contacts
- Anyone sharing illicit drugs with a case
- Anyone sharing food or eating or drinking utensils with a case
- Anyone consuming ready-to-eat foods prepared by an infectious person