

Immune Globulin (IG) Information Sheet for Prevention of Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A disease?

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. Symptoms usually last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill for as long as 6 months. In rare cases, the illness can be severe enough to cause death. People 50 years of age and older and people with liver disease are more likely to have severe illness. Once a person has recovered from hepatitis A disease they are protected from getting the infection again.

How is hepatitis A spread?

The virus is most commonly found in the stool of an infected person. It is spread through food, water or drinks contaminated by stool from an infected person.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

The symptoms can vary from person to person. Some people, especially young children, may have no symptoms. The symptoms of hepatitis A appear slowly and may include: fever, tiredness; loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting; pain in the stomach area; dark urine (tea-colored) and pale stools; jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

When is preventive treatment for possible exposure to hepatitis A recommended?

Contact your local or state health department for information on if or when preventive treatment is recommended. Immune globulin (IG) and hepatitis A vaccine are effective in preventing hepatitis A infection if a person has been exposed to someone infected with hepatitis A. The following are situations for which preventive treatment is indicated:

- If you have had close personal contact with a person who has hepatitis A infection (this includes contacts such as household members, caregivers or babysitters, sexual contacts, people who share illegal drugs).
- If you have eaten food or drinks that might have been contaminated with hepatitis A virus. You will know this if your local health department contacted you or made a public announcement.

What is immune globulin?

Immune Globulin (IG) is a substance made from human blood plasma that contains concentrated amounts of antibodies that protect against infection. IG is given as a shot and provides short-term protection (approximately 3 months) against Hepatitis A. When administered within 2 weeks after an exposure to hepatitis A virus, IG is effective in preventing hepatitis A infection. IG must be given within 2 weeks after exposure for the best protection.

Is IG safe?

IG is among the safest blood products available. All donors are carefully screened and all blood plasma collected is tested. In addition, the product is treated with heat and chemical processes to eliminate any other germs in case they are missed during the screening process. IG does not contain any preservatives.

Who should receive IG after possible hepatitis A exposure?

- If you are between the ages of 1 year and 40 years, you are likely to get the hepatitis A vaccine.
- If you are older than 40 years, you are likely to get IG, although vaccine can be used if IG is unavailable. Your risk of hepatitis A infection from the exposure can be considered to decide whether to use vaccine or IG for prevention.
- Immune globulin should be used if you:
 - are less than 1 year of age,
 - have a weakened immune system, including people who have cancer, chronic kidney disease, or are receiving chemotherapy or certain medications such as steroids,
 - have been diagnosed with chronic liver disease, or
 - are not able to safely receive hepatitis A vaccine.

What are the possible side effects to IG?

Most people have no reactions to IG. Reactions that do occur are typically mild. Possible reactions include: swelling, redness or pain at the injection site or itching. Severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) are rare. Thrombosis (blood clot inside a blood vessel blocking blood flow) may occur with immune globulin treatment, but is rare. Persons who develop pain and/or swelling of an arm or leg with warmth over the affected area, discoloration of an arm or leg, unexplained shortness of breath, chest pain or discomfort that worsens with deep breathing, unexplained fast pulse, or numbness or weakness on one side of the body should report symptoms to their health care provider immediately.

Who should contact their health care provider before receiving IG?

- Persons with a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of immune globulin.
- Persons with a serious allergic reaction to latex. Most people who have only a contact allergy to latex can receive immune globulin.
- Persons with certain antibody deficiencies (such as immunoglobulin A deficiency).
- Persons who have severe problems with bleeding, including low platelet counts. Your provider may decide it is safe for you to get an IG shot, or they may decide to give it to you in your vein.

Are there interactions with IG and other vaccines?

- People who received a measles, mumps, rubella or varicella containing vaccine in the 14 days before receiving IG, may need to have the vaccine dose repeated.
- Those who receive IG should postpone receiving measles, mumps, rubella or varicella containing vaccine for at least 3 - 5 months after receiving IG.
- Talk to your public health nurse or health care provider for more information.

Be sure to let your healthcare provider know that you receive IG today.

This material is designed for information purposes only. If you have specific questions please consult your doctor or appropriate healthcare professional.