

Answers to Your Questions about Hepatitis A

Should I be concerned about hepatitis A in Boise?

On February 9, 2012, public health officials in the Treasure Valley announced the possibility of exposure to hepatitis A for customers of the Cheesecake Factory, 330 North Milwaukee, Boise. The risk to the public health is extremely low because the employee was not involved in food preparation. Information is being provided to protect the public's health and control the potential spread of disease.

An employee of the Cheesecake Factory was diagnosed with hepatitis A infection, but is no longer contagious. Customers who ate or drank at the restaurant between December 13, 2011 and January 22, 2012 may have been exposed to the hepatitis A virus.

If I ate or drank at the Cheesecake Factory what should I do?

Watch to see if you develop the symptoms of hepatitis A.

If you do not have symptoms of Hepatitis A you should still continue to practice good hand hygiene, washing thoroughly so that you don't expose anyone else to the possibility of infection.

If you have had the two-dose hepatitis A vaccine or if you have had the disease in the past, you are protected from the illness and there is nothing more you have to do.

It is only if you are exhibiting symptoms of hepatitis A that you should consult your medical provider.

Central District Health does not provide primary care services.

We have now passed the point where a hepatitis A vaccination would be effective. Please wait and watch for the symptoms of hepatitis A.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

The average time period for symptoms of hepatitis A to develop is around 28 days after exposure, but can range from 15-50 days. Some persons with hepatitis A virus infection, particularly young children, may not have any symptoms of the disease. Older persons are more likely to have symptoms than children.

Symptoms include:

- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
 - Fatigue • Abdominal pain
 - Loss of appetite • Nausea
 - Diarrhea • Fever
- Symptoms usually last less than two months

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. In the U.S., hepatitis A can occur in situations ranging from isolated cases of disease to widespread epidemics. Hepatitis A can affect anyone. Good personal hygiene and proper sanitation can help prevent hepatitis A. Vaccines are also available for long term prevention of hepatitis A infection in persons 12 months of age and older. A vaccine and/or immune globulin (IG) is available for short-term prevention.

How is hepatitis A virus transmitted?

Hepatitis A virus is spread from person-to-person. A person with hepatitis A who has not washed their hands properly after using the bathroom and has the virus on their hands can spread the disease to another person. They can do this by touching items or food that other people put into their mouths. For this reason, the virus is easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where good personal hygiene is not observed.

Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A. Casual contact in the office, factory, or school setting does not spread the virus.

How do I know if I have hepatitis A?

A blood test (IgM anti-HAV) is needed to diagnose hepatitis A. Talk to your doctor if you suspect you have been exposed to any type of viral hepatitis.

Who is at risk for hepatitis A infection?

The following groups of people are at greater risk for hepatitis A than the general public:

- Household members of infected persons
- Sex partners of infected persons
- Persons traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common
- Men who have sex with men
- Users of injection and non-injection drugs
- Persons, especially children, living in areas with increased rates of hepatitis A from 1987-97

How can I prevent hepatitis A?

Always wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing or eating food. Two products are used to prevent hepatitis A virus infection: immune globulin and hepatitis A vaccine.

Immune globulin is a preparation of antibodies that can be given before exposure for short-term protection against hepatitis A and for persons who have already been exposed to the hepatitis A virus. Immune globulin must be given within two weeks after exposure for maximum protection. We have passed the time when Immune globulin would be effective in preventing the disease.

Hepatitis A vaccine has been licensed in the U.S. for use in persons 12 months of age and older. The vaccine is recommended before exposure to hepatitis A virus for persons who are more likely to get hepatitis A or are more likely to get seriously ill if they do get hepatitis A. The vaccines currently licensed in the U.S. are HAVRIX® (manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline) and VAQTA® (manufactured by Merck & Co., Inc). The vaccine can also be used to prevent infection after exposure. Like immune globulin, it must also be given within two weeks after exposure. And like immune globulin, we have passed the time when the vaccine would be effective in preventing the disease if you were exposed to it in this situation. The vaccine is recommended for healthy persons age 1-40.

What is being done to protect residents from hepatitis A?

Central District Health is providing information to the local medical community on how to prevent hepatitis A infection. We have also been working with the restaurant. Management at the Cheesecake Factory has been very cooperative. In addition, CDHD is providing information to the news media so they can post it to their websites.

Resources:

CDHD Hepatitis A Disease Information Sheet

<http://cdhd.idaho.gov/CD/public/factsheets/hepA.htm>

CDHD Hepatitis A Vaccine Information Sheet

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-hep-a.pdf>

CDHD Immunization Clinic Hours and Contact Information

<http://cdhd.idaho.gov/IMM/index.htm#>

Prevention of Hepatitis A after Exposure to Hepatitis A Virus and in International Travelers

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5641a3.htm>