# Protect Yourself from Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B…

## A Guide For Gay and Bisexual Men

Men who have sex with men are at increased risk of becoming infected with both the hepatitis A virus and the hepatitis B 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 A and hepatitis B can be prevented by safe and effective vaccines that are recommended for all men who have sex with men. Unfortunately, many men at risk remain unprotected.

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

In 2020, an estimated 14,000 people in the U.S. were newly infected with the hepatitis B virus and 39 states reported 11,635 newly diagnosed chronic hepatitis B infections. About 5% of people in the U.S. will get infected sometime during their lives. Men who have sex with men are 10 to 15 times more likely to acquire the hepatitis B virus than the general population.

During 2020, an estimated 19,900 people in the U.S. were infected with the hepatitis A virus. Persons who engage in anal pleasuring activities such as rimming and fingering are at increased risk.

### How are hepatitis A virus and hepatitis B 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, piercing, or tattooing
- coming in contact with the infected person's open sores or blood
- 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 A and hepatitis B?

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 either hepatitis A virus or hepatitis B virus can spread the disease to others, whether they have symptoms or not.

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

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for eventual liver failure (cirrhosis) and liver cancer and need ongoing medical care. An estimated 880,000 to 1.89 million people in the U.S. (and 257–193 million worldwide) are chronically infected.

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

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

Hepatitis B virus infection can cause serious liver disease, including liver failure and liver cancer. In 2018, a total of 1,649 deaths from hepatitis B were reported in the U.S.

Beginning in 2016, the U.S. saw a large increase in hepatitis A cases related to large outbreaks in persons experiencing homelessness or injection and non-injection drug use spreading from person to person in several states. From 2016 through October 6, 2022, 44,660 hepatitis A virus infections, including 27,282 hospitalizations (61%), and 417 deaths have been reported to CDC.

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

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

- Get the hepatitis B shots
- Practice safer sex (e.g., use condoms, limit the number of sexual partners)
- Help your friends who are at risk to get protected by telling them to get vaccinated against hepatitis B

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

- Get the hepatitis A shots
- Help your friends who are at risk to get protected by telling them to get vaccinated against hepatitis A

## How do I know if I have or have had hepatitis A virus or hepatitis B 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 healthcare provider whether testing is recommended for you. They may draw blood for testing and give the first vaccination at the same visit to make it easier for you to complete the vaccine series if you need it. If you have already been infected with hepatitis A virus or hepatitis B virus, getting the vaccines will not help or hurt you. The only way to know for sure if you have already been infected is to have your blood tested.

## 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 two or three doses given over one to six months, depending on the vaccine brand.

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

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

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

Both hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines have been proven to be safe. Globally, more than one billion hepatitis B vaccine doses have been given. Since 1995, tens of millions of 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 two or three doses, depending on vaccine brand, 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 completing the initial vaccine series to see if they responded.

Almost 100% of people who have a normal immune system are protected from hepatitis A virus infection after getting two doses of hepatitis A vaccine.

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

No. Hepatitis A, B, and C are all different viruses. Unfortunately, there is no hepatitis C vaccine at this time, but treatment is available for hepatitis C.

## Are these shots recommended for other adults?

Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for adults 19 through 59 years of age and for anyone age 60 or older who is at increased risk of hepatitis B or who simply wants to be protected. Most people younger than age 30 born in the United States were vaccinated in childhood.

Hepatitis A vaccine is also recommended for all children and many adults, including adults who travel to parts of the world where hepatitis A is common, as well as adults experiencing homelessness, those living with HIV infection, those with liver disease, and those who use recreational drugs, among others. Any adult also may get vaccinated against hepatitis A if they wish to be protected — just ask your healthcare provider.

## Where can I receive these shots?

Talk to your healthcare professional or your local public health department.

### EVERYONE NEEDS VACCINATIONS!

If you can't afford shots or don't know where to get them, contact your local or state health department to find out where to go for affordable vaccinations.

You can access a listing of telephone numbers for state immunization programs at www.immunize.org/coordinators.

For more information, go to www.vaccineinformation.org or www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.

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