

Traveller Information Sheets



Hepatitis Information Sheets

What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is a disease that affects the liver. Travellers as well as people in general can contract hepatitis. There are many forms of hepatitis, these are further explained below;

1. Hepatitis A
2. Hepatitis B
3. Hepatitis C
4. Hepatitis E

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is the most common vaccine preventable disease in travellers. The disease can be contracted directly from infected persons or via eating or drinking food / water contaminated with infected faecal matter. The symptoms of hepatitis A include; fever, headache, nausea and vomiting and abdominal cramping. Jaundice follows a few days later. There is a case fatality rate greater than 2% for persons over 40 years of age. The fatality rate increases with age.

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B can be contracted through contact with blood and bodily fluids of an infected person, unprotected sex and sharing of needles and syringes with infected persons. There is potential risk through other skin puncturing procedures such as tattooing, acupuncture and body piercing. The symptoms of hepatitis B include; loss of appetite, abdominal cramping, nausea and vomiting and the development of jaundice. There is a case fatality rate of 1% in adults. People who suffer the disease can develop cirrroses of the liver and/or liver cancer.

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C can be transmitted via sharing needles and syringes with an infected person, unprotected sex, skin puncturing procedures such as tattooing, acupuncture and body piercing. In the early 1980's blood transfusions were inadvertently transmitting the hepatitis C virus, as the technology to screen the blood for disease was not advanced in detecting this disease. The symptoms of Hepatitis C include; loss of appetite, abdominal cramps, nausea and vomiting and jaundice. Most infected people will develop chronic liver disease and/or cirrhosis.

What is Hepatitis E?

Hepatitis E infection also affects the liver. It is contracted via drinking water which has been contaminated with infected faecal matter. Infection is usually self limiting, lasting 4-6 weeks. Occasionally fulminant type can develop, resulting in liver failure, which can be fatal. This incidence of this form of hepatitis is highest in South and East Asia. The symptoms include; jaundice, loss of appetite, an enlarged and tender liver, nausea and vomiting. Hepatitis E is an emergency for pregnant women.

Can I be vaccinated against any of the Hepatitis viruses?

At the present time, travellers can only be vaccinated against hepatitis A and Hepatitis B. A vaccine against hepatitis E has been licensed for use in China, but is not yet available globally. Hepatitis A and B single injections are available or a combination injection is available.

A course of two injections is recommended to protect travellers against Hepatitis A, given at 0 and 6 months.

A course of three vaccinations is recommended to protect travellers from Hepatitis B, given at 0, 1 and 6 months

If a traveller decides to have the combination vaccine of hepatitis A and B a course of three injections is required for protection against Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B, given at 0, 1, and 6 months.

If you are unsure of your hepatitis A / B vaccination status?

We can perform a blood analysis to check if you have the required level of antibodies in your blood. Results are known in a few days. If the results show that your antibody level is low we will be able to administer a booster.

What do I do if I travel before I finish the course?

A rapid schedule exists for travellers who want the maximum coverage prior to travel. Given at 0, 1, 2 and 12 months or 0, 7, 21 days and 12 months. NOTE: there is an extra vaccine needed. Or travellers can complete the course at their destination, or when they return.

Who can have the vaccination?

The adult dose vaccinations can be given to persons 15 years of age and over.

The paediatric dose vaccinations can be given to children between 1 – 15 years of age.

References

World Health Organisation 2013, Geneva Switzerland, viewed 8th April 2014, <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs328/en/>>

World Health Organisation 2013, Geneva Switzerland, viewed 8th April 2014, <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs204/en/>>

World Health Organisation 2013, Geneva Switzerland, viewed 8th April 2014, <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs164/en/>>

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