

Answers to Your Questions

About Hepatitis A

Southwest District Health

March 25, 2008

Should I be concerned about hepatitis A in Boise?

On March 25, 2008, public health officials in the Treasure Valley announced the possibility of exposure to hepatitis A for customers of the Red Feather Lounge, 246 N 8th St, Boise. While the risk to the public's health is low, information is being provided to protect the public's health and control the spread of disease.

An employee of the Red Feather Lounge has been diagnosed with hepatitis A infection. Customers and employees who ate or drank at the restaurant on **March 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 or 17** may have been exposed to the hepatitis A virus. Because it is likely that the employee followed good hand hygiene and food safety practices, the risk of exposure is low.

If I ate or drank at the Red Feather Lounge what should I do?

It is important to know that if you have had a hepatitis A vaccine or you have had the disease, you are protected from the illness and you don't have to do anything. If you ate or drank at the Red Feather on the dates mentioned above you may have been exposed to hepatitis A. Even though the risk of exposure is small, the public health officials are recommending that people who are *not protected* be advised of the following:

If you ate or drank at the Red Feather Lounge on **March 5, 6, 7, 8 or 10**, you should be watching for symptoms. You will not benefit from the hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG). Symptoms of hepatitis A are listed below.

If you ate or drank at the Red Feather Lounge **March 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 or 17** you may have

been exposed to hepatitis A. The vaccine or IG can prevent you from getting the illness. If you are in this group, please contact your medical provider to get the vaccine or immune globulin. If you are in this group but do not have a medical provider, vaccines and IG will be available at the both Central District Health and Southwest District Health on a limited basis. To make an immunization appointment call 327-7450 for the Central District Health Immunizations Department, and 455-5300 for Southwest District Health.

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 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.



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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 usually last less than two months.

Symptoms include:

- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- Fatigue
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Fever

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.

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. The vaccine is recommended for healthy persons age 1-40.

What is being done to protect residents from hepatitis A?

Both Central District Health and Southwest District Health are providing information to the local medical community and to the news media. The health districts are making available, on a limited basis, vaccines and IG for people who are not protected (*protection means having already had the vaccine or the illness*), who ate or drank at the Red Feather Lounge on **March 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 or 17**.

For more information on hepatitis A, please call or visit:

Central District Health Department
208-327-7450
www.cdhd.idaho.gov

Southwest District Health
208-455-5300
www.swdh.org

