

# Chief Health Officer Alert

## Hepatitis A Outbreak

Friday, 6 November 2009

**As you may be aware, the Victorian Department of Health has recognised an increase in the number of locally acquired hepatitis A cases across the state. Please consider the diagnosis of hepatitis A in any person presenting with acute hepatitis.**

Patients may present with symptoms such as loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, tiredness, fever, abdominal pain, dark urine, pale faeces and jaundice. The incubation period is 15 to 50 days, and transmission occurs via the faecal-oral route through the ingestion of contaminated food or water, or through direct hand-to-mouth contact with the faeces of an infectious case.

Cases are infectious **two weeks before and one week after** the onset of jaundice/dark urine (whichever is first). It is therefore important that close contacts receive post-exposure prophylaxis as soon as possible, and within 14 days after their last contact with the case during their infectious period.

These include:

- Household contacts (including people who have had an overnight stay at the case's house during their infectious period).
- Sexual contacts.
- People who have consumed food prepared by the case.

**Normal Human Immunoglobulin (NHIG) or the hepatitis A vaccine can be given as post-exposure prophylaxis.** Prophylaxis should be received by contacts within 14 days of their last contact with the infectious case. The department currently provides NHIG free of charge to contacts of hepatitis A cases. This can be arranged by the department and delivered to your practice during normal working hours. If required urgently, NHIG can be obtained after hours by contacting the CSL after hours telephone number on 0413 027 298.

Information relating to the dosage and administration of NHIG is available from the Australian Immunisation Handbook 9th Edition (2008), pages 146–148 and 175–183, and summarised below:

Weight	Dose
Under 25kg	0.5ml
25-50kgs	1.0ml
Over 50kgs	2.0ml

The injection should be given by deep IM injection using a large (19 or 20) gauge needle. Please note that NHIG can potentially interact with vaccines—refer to pages 175–183 of the Australian Immunisation Handbook for further information.

**Food handlers, child care workers and health care workers should be excluded from work until one week after the onset of jaundice/dark urine.**

Under the Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 2001, hepatitis A is required to be notified to the Department of Health by medical practitioners within five days. Notifications can be made:

- online at [www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/notifying](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/notifying)
- via telephone on 1300 651 160, or
- via fax on 1300 651 170.

An after hours telephone number is also available: 1300 790 733. Information about hepatitis A is available on our website:

- [www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/diseases/hepa](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/diseases/hepa)

Investigations by the department have identified an association between illness with hepatitis A and the consumption of semidried tomatoes. A health alert has been issued, and is available at:

- [www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefhealthofficer](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefhealthofficer)

Yours sincerely



Dr John Carnie  
Chief Health Officer