

TWINRIX (HEPATITIS A & B COMBINATION)

Disease Risk & Transmission

Hepatitis A (HAV) is a highly contagious liver disease with the common mode of transmission being person to person. Hepatitis A is found in the stool of infected persons and infection may be spread by contaminated water or food, by infected food handlers, after breakdown in sanitary conditions, or after floods or natural disasters, by ingestion of raw or uncooked shellfish from contaminated water, or by needle transmission (sharing needles, blood transfusions from infected persons), in daycare centers, during anal intercourse and during travel to countries in the world with poor hygienic conditions. A person who has Hepatitis A can easily spread on to others within the same household or dormitory. Symptoms include mild, flu-like symptoms, jaundice, decreased appetite, nausea and stomach pains, and diarrhea

Hepatitis B (HBV) is an infection of the liver caused by the Hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B is spread through contact with the blood of an infected person. Between 6-10 of every 100 young adults who have Hepatitis B become chronic carriers (have Hepatitis B in their blood for 6 or more months) and may be able to spread the infection to others for a long time. Hepatitis B is highly infective if there is contact with infected blood or serum through puncture wounds, splashes into the mucous membranes, contamination of open wounds, and injecting illegal drugs. It can be transmitted sexually, during birth and by sharing personal items such as razors and toothbrushes with an infected person. Symptoms include loss of appetite, tiredness, diarrhea & vomiting, pain in muscles and joints, dark urine & skin rashes. The serious complications of HBV are chronic cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Twinrix: The Vaccine

Twinrix is a combination of Hepatitis A & B vaccine. Twinrix is a safe and effective alternative for adult travelers who need vaccination against HAV and HBV, as long as two doses can be given before departure. If there is only time for one dose, vaccination against Hepatitis A would be best handled by a dose of regular Hepatitis A vaccine. Effectiveness of the combination of HAV/HBV is very high and is comparable to the effectiveness of the separate HBV and HAV vaccines. One month after receiving the third and final dose of the vaccine, immunity was seen in 99.9% of people receiving the vaccine and immunity to HBV was seen in 98.5% of the people receiving the vaccine.

Twinrix is administered in the upper arm. It is given in a three shot series given over six months. The second shot should be received one month after the first shot. The third shot should be received five months after the second shot.

Who Should Get The Combination HAV/HBV Vaccine (TWINRIX)

The combination HAV/HBV (TWINRIX) vaccine should only be given to people who are over 18 years of age and older. Since Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for all students entering the University of Virginia, the combination vaccine (TWINRIX) would also provide immunity if you should you decide to travel during your college years. If you have already had one dose of Hepatitis B vaccine, you must continue with the single doses of HBV since you would already have missed 1/3 of the dose of Hepatitis A that is included in the TWINRIX vaccine.

Other candidates for the combination HAV/HBV vaccine are:

- Travelers to areas of high intermediate prevalence of both Hepatitis A & B who have risk factors for acquiring hepatitis B.
- Health care workers and those individuals who might render medical assistance to others.
- Users of injectable drugs
- Patients who frequently receive blood products such as hemophiliacs.
- Household contacts of patients with acute or relapsing hepatitis A & B who are at risk of acquiring these infections.

Potential Risks, Side Effects, and Unusual Conditions. What To Do

A vaccine like any medicine is capable of causing problems such as an allergic reaction. Rarely anaphylaxis and or anaphylactoid reactions have been reported after receiving the HAV/HBV combination vaccine. The most common side effects are soreness at the injection site, headache, fatigue and loss of appetite.

Any unusual condition, such as a high fever or behavior change could indicate a serious reaction. Serious allergic reactions are extremely rare with any vaccine. If one were to occur however, it would be within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot. Signs of serious allergic reactions can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heartbeat or dizziness. If you suspect this has occurred, can your doctor immediately, describe your circumstances and when the vaccination was given.

How Can I Learn More?

- Ask your doctor or nurse to give you a copy of the vaccine package insert.
- Visit the National Immunization Program web site at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/nip> or the U.S.
- Centers for Disease control of Viral Hepatitis at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis>