



NL Health Services

To: Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Emergency Departments, Urgent Care and Walk in Clinics
From: Dr. Jennifer LeMessurier, Medical Officer of Health, Population and Public Health, NL Health Services
Date: August 15, 2023
Re: **Hepatitis A infections in Newfoundland and Labrador**

Newfoundland and Labrador residents occasionally experience Hepatitis A infections, with typically 2-3 cases per year. Most infections in the province over the last decade have been travel-related due to exposure to food and water in countries where the virus circulates. Some infections have been linked to broader food-borne outbreaks in Canada including, in most recent years, imported contaminated frozen fruit. Public health exposure notifications are regularly issued across the country related to food handling as well as exposures in child care centres and kindergarten classes.

Please consider Hepatitis A infection in your differential diagnosis for patients presenting with acute hepatitis. To help prevent further transmission, please advise individuals to refrain from food handling (including at work and home), providing direct patient care, and from child care settings if you are investigating for symptomatic acute hepatitis A infection.

Report suspected clinical and confirmed Hepatitis A infections to your **regional CDC program** by phone and/or in writing as per the **Notifiable Diseases List**, available from:
<https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/files/Notifiable-Disease-List-and-Notification-Form.pdf>

NLHS Contact	Phone	Fax
Eastern Urban and Rural Zones	(709) 752-4358	(709) 752-4873
Central Zone	(709) 571-2183/422-1740	(709) 651-6483
Western Zone	(709) 643-1830	(709) 643-8541
Labrador-Grenfell Zone—North	(709) 897-3110	(709) 896-4393
Labrador-Grenfell Zone—West	(709) 285-8410	(709) 896-4393

Hepatitis A infection

Symptoms of Hepatitis A infection typically occur one month after exposure to the virus, with an incubation period ranging from 15 to 50 days. Signs and symptoms often start abruptly with fever, malaise, anorexia, nausea and abdominal discomfort, followed within a few days by jaundice. Infection is spread from person to person via the fecal-oral route, and through contaminated food, water and the environment. Individuals are infectious two weeks prior to symptom onset and until one week after the onset of jaundice. Those at highest risk of severe complications from Hepatitis A include individuals living with chronic liver disease and those aged 60 years and older. Young children are more likely to have asymptomatic infection but may still spread the virus.

Hepatitis A testing

Hepatitis A IgM antibody (Anti-HAV IgM) is the recommended test for investigating **symptomatic patients for acute hepatitis A infection** at the NL Public Health Microbiology Laboratory (PHML). This test is not included in the Hepatitis Diagnosis/Screening panel ('HEPDX') which screens for Hepatitis B and C virus. Positive IgM results are sent to the National Microbiology Laboratory for confirmation with

PCR and genotyping. False positive IgM results may be observed following immunization with Hepatitis A vaccine and with past/resolved natural infection.

- **More information on testing** from PHML is available at: <https://publichealthlab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/PHML-Memo-Hepatitis-Serology-Order-Change-15.12.2022.pdf>
- The current standard provincial outpatient **laboratory requisition** is available in EMR and from: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/labformulary/files/R0001APR23-Outpatient-Specimen-Collection-Requisition.pdf>

Hepatitis A immunization and post-exposure prophylaxis

Pre-exposure Hepatitis A immunization is considered 90-97% effective after completion of a two-dose series. When vaccine is used for post-exposure prophylaxis, it is approximately 80% effective when given within one week. While **Hepatitis A vaccine is preferred for post-exposure prophylaxis** for those over 6 months of age, some individuals may be recommended to receive **human immunoglobulin** including infants less than 6 months of age, those who are immunocompromised, living with chronic liver disease, certain individuals with household exposure who are 60 years of age and older, and those who have contraindications to receiving vaccine.

Publicly funded Hepatitis A vaccine is available for individuals who may have been exposed to Hepatitis A virus, are at risk of chronic liver disease including individuals living with Hepatitis B and/or C, receive multiple blood transfusions or products, use inhalational or injection drugs, and who have a higher risk of exposure during sexual contact. Additional groups recommended to receive immunization are outlined in the **Canadian Immunization Guide**.

- More information on immunization and pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis is available in the latest version of the **Canadian Immunization Guide**: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/canadian-immunization-guide-part-4-active-vaccines/page-6-hepatitis-a-vaccine.html>
- **Patient information sheets** on Hepatitis A infection and immunization are available from the **Canadian Pediatric Society**: https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/health-conditions-and-treatments/hepatitis_a and the **Department of Health and Community Services**: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/files/publichealth-cdc-hepatitis-a-fact-sheet2018.pdf>