

About Hepatitis A & B

Q1. : Should I take the hepatitis A vaccine?

A : The hepatitis A vaccine is now approved only for people over 2 years old. Its main ingredient is inactivated hepatitis A virus. After injection into the muscle, the vaccine will cause the production of antibodies against the hepatitis A virus. The success rate is over 94%. A complete course of vaccination requires 2 injections into the upper arm. The second injection is usually given about 6 to 12 months after the first. It is believed that the immunity conferred by vaccination will last for more than 10 years.

In Hong Kong, because the majority of people below the age of 30 have never been exposed to hepatitis A. Vaccination is worthwhile in this age group. No blood test is needed before vaccination. And because of high success rate, blood tests after vaccination are not necessary either. You are advised to consult your doctor before you receive the vaccine.

Q2. : Should I take the hepatitis B vaccine?

A : The hepatitis B vaccine is composed of the surface antigen of hepatitis B. The vaccine does not carry any risk of transmitting other infections because it is made by genetic engineering. After injection into the human body, the vaccine stimulates the production of the hepatitis B surface antibody. The complete course of vaccination takes a total of three injections. The second injection is given 1 month after the first, and the third injection 5 months after the second. Serious side effects after administration of the hepatitis B vaccine are rare. The most common side effects are soreness at the point of the injection, and slight fever. About 90 to 95% of people will gain immunity to hepatitis B after a full course of vaccination.

Before you receive the vaccine, you should preferably have blood test to see if you have been exposed to the virus before. Only people who have never been exposed to hepatitis B should be vaccinated. If you are already a carrier of the virus, vaccination will not work, although it does not do any harm either. A blood test might also show that you already have natural immunity to hepatitis B because of previous exposure to the virus. In this case, vaccination is unnecessary.