A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Hep A on the Decline

Hepatitis A Vaccination Coverage Among Children Aged 24–35 Months — United States, 2006 and 2007

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Hepatitis A is an infectious disease that's usually caused by consuming contaminated food or water. Before the approval of the first hepatitis A vaccine in 1995, more than a quarter of a million persons in the United States developed the disease each year. However, cases have decreased dramatically since the use of the vaccine has become more common.

Dr. Dale Hu is a medical epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis. He's joining us today by telephone to discuss the success of hepatitis A vaccine. Welcome to the show, Dale.

[Dr. Hu] Thank you for inviting me, Bob. It's really a pleasure to speak with you today.

[Dr. Gaynes] Dale, how many cases of hepatitis A occur each year?

[Dr. Hu] Well, if we look at the year 2007, which is really the most recent year which we have complete data available, we had probably just under 3,000 cases reported. But one thing that's really important for people to realize is that when they look at these official statistics, it really represents a very small portion of the true number of cases.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, what are the symptoms of the disease?

[Dr. Hu] For hepatitis A, which is really very similar to other forms of viral hepatitis, such as hepatitis B and hepatitis C, when people do have symptoms, they typically involve having a fever, feeling tired, having a loss of appetite, having nausea and vomiting and stomach pain. And people will also notice that they will have dark colored urine and light or clay colored bowel movements. But one of the most striking features of hepatitis is jaundice which is a yellowing of the skin and yellowing of the white parts of the eyes. But one thing that's very important to realize is that among children, especially younger children, the majority of these children will not have any symptoms.

[Dr. Gaynes] Dale, is hepatitis A more common in any particular age group?

[Dr. Hu] Before vaccines were available in the mid-1990s, rates of hepatitis were highest in children between the age of 5 and 14 years of age. But since hepatitis A vaccine became available, and most recently has been shown to be gradually increasing in use, the rates of hepatitis A have really decreased dramatically among children, such that now the rates are fairly

even across most age groups, although they're slightly higher in young adults between 25 and 39 years of age.

[Dr. Gaynes] At what age is the hepatitis A vaccine recommended?

[Dr. Hu] The hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for all children between 12 and 23 months of age.

[Dr. Gaynes] And how many doses are required?

[Dr. Hu] When people are vaccinated with the full two dose series of hepatitis vaccine, they are generally very well protected against hepatitis A.

[Dr. Gaynes] Does the vaccine give a person lifetime immunity from the disease?

[Dr. Hu] Well, since the vaccine was licensed back in the mid-1990s, we now have data for over 10 years showing persistence of protection from hepatitis A. But what's really good to know is when scientists have been looking at the antibodies from the vaccine, they estimate that protection may last more than 15 years and in some estimates, possibly over 20 years; but in either case, it's really important to monitor this over time.

[Dr. Gaynes] Dale, where can listeners get more information about the hepatitis A vaccine?

[Dr. Hu] One very good website is our own CDC website which is www.cdc.gov/hepatitis, which is h-e-p-a-t-i-t-i-s.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks Dale. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Dale Hu about the success of the hepatitis A vaccine.

While hepatitis A vaccine has dramatically decreased the number of cases in the U.S., the risk of infection remains. For continued protection, two doses are required to achieve immunity. Parents should consult their healthcare provider to ensure their child is up-to-date on all vaccines.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC.*

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.