



Why You Should Consider Receiving the Hepatitis A Vaccination.

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The International Association of Fire Fighters has purchased 4,000 Hepatitis A Vaccinations, 2,000 Tetanus Vaccinations, and injection supplies for members who are working in active flood waters in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. However, a number of recent recommendation proposed by decision makers have advised first responders that the risk of contracting Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) is no higher than that of the general population and receiving the vaccination may not be of concern priority for regional first responders. Additionally, it has been suggested that childhood vaccinations may still provide adequate protection into adulthood.

Despite the assertion that there is no increased risk of exposure between first responders and the general public; fire fighters, EMS providers, and other first responders represent a critical component of a community's infrastructure. As such, in the wake of a disaster the recovery period in affected communities can take weeks to months and a healthy, functioning public safety network is an absolute necessary to support these community.

What was not mentioned in decision maker guidance

First, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) advises that floodwater often contains infectious organisms, including HAV and tetanus (OSHA, 2003).

CDC guidelines regarding HAV vaccines directs anyone who has recently been exposed to HAV should receive a dose of the single-antigen Hepatitis A vaccine within two weeks of their exposure or immune globulin (IG) dosed at 0.02 mL/kg (CDC, July 2016).

Additionally:

- For healthy persons aged 12 months to 40 years, single-antigen Hepatitis A vaccine at the age-appropriate dose is preferred to IG because of the vaccine's advantages, including long-term protection and ease of administration, as well as the equivalent efficacy of vaccine to IG.
- **Vaccine can be used if IG cannot be obtained.**

Furthermore, CDC recommends that children should be vaccinated at age 1 (12-23 months), also advising that protective levels of the antibody to HAV could only be present for at least 14 to 20 years (CDC, 2016). Given this, unless a person received the vaccine in their teens it is likely that they will no longer have an immunity to protect them from infection. Again, supporting the need for fire fighters, EMS workers, and other first responders to receive a HAV vaccine.

Some other things for you to consider

- Greater than 70% of all adults that become infected with Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) will be symptomatic with Jaundice (CDC, 2016).
- Signs and Symptoms of HAV usually last less than 2 months, but 10-15% of symptomatic persons have prolonged or relapsing disease for up to 6 month (CDC, 2016).
- HAV Vaccine can be administered at the same time as the tetanus shot, but in different injection sites (CDC, 2016).
- A second injection of HAV vaccine should be received 6 months from the first dose to complete the series (CDC, 2016).
- For the second dose, although studies have not been done to examine this issue, there is no reason to believe that using single-antigen vaccine from different manufacturers would be a problem (CDC, 2016).
- Post-vaccination testing is not indicated because of the high rate of vaccine response among adults and children. In addition, not all testing methods approved for routine diagnostic use in the United States have the sensitivity to detect low, but protective, anti-HAV concentrations after vaccination (CDC, 2016).

Resources:

Centers for Disease Control [CDC]. (2016, July 13). Hepatitis A Questions and Answers for Health Professionals. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/havfaq.htm>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA]. (2003). OSHA Fact Sheet: Flood Cleanup. Retrieved from: https://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_Hurricane_Facts/Bulletin2.pdf