

## Hepatitis A Outbreak

### FAQs

(updated June 4, 2013)



**What is happening?** A frozen berry mix, Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend sold by Costco, has caused an outbreak of hepatitis A in several Western states that has sickened more than 40 people.

**Is Oregon affected?** To date, no cases of related hepatitis A have been identified in Oregon, though certain lots of the frozen berry mix were sold through Costco stores in Oregon. Also, Townsend Farms, the company that assembled the product, is located in Oregon. It's not yet known whether the affected berries were grown in Oregon.

**Which Costco stores sold the berries?** Distribution records show that Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend was shipped to 13 Costco stores in Oregon, including Portland, Aloha, Eugene, Medford, Salem, Clackamas, Bend, Tigard, Albany, Hillsboro, Wilsonville, Warrenton and Roseburg.

**I have some of those berries in my freezer. What should I do?** Do not eat any of the berries, even if you haven't gotten sick from them. You can either discard them or return them to Costco for a refund. Costco has called the customers who have purchased this product; they have also voluntarily recalled certain lots.

**What if I've eaten the berries?** If you have eaten any Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend in the last two weeks, talk to your health care provider about getting the hepatitis A vaccine. If it has been more than two weeks, vaccine will no longer work. Most children are vaccinated against hepatitis A, so they are already protected. If you have had the vaccine, you are protected. It is important for persons who have serious medical conditions, especially liver disease or diseases affecting the immune system, to get vaccinated if they were exposed to these berries within the previous 14 days. Health care providers may recommend immune globulin if a vaccination is not appropriate.

**What is hepatitis A?** Hepatitis A is a human disease that may occur when an infected food handler prepares food without appropriate hand hygiene, but more commonly, it is transmitted by close contact among family members. Food contaminated with hepatitis A virus, as is suspected in this outbreak, can cause outbreaks of disease among persons who eat or handle food.

**What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?** Hepatitis A causes fever, malaise, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice — a yellow pigment in the eyes and skin. The illness can last several weeks to months, but most cases recover completely with life-long immunity. In rare cases, particularly in older patients or those who already have liver disease, infection can progress to liver failure and death. Persons with underlying liver conditions should be vaccinated. Hepatitis A begins 15–50 days (usually about 1 month) after exposure to the virus.

**How common is hepatitis A?** Because of the vaccine, hepatitis A has become rare in the United States; travelers to developing countries are at highest risk. This outbreak was solved by alert public health officials in New Mexico, who noticed a couple of cases in persons who hadn't traveled out of the country, interviewed them extensively, and made the connection with berries that was later confirmed in other western states.

**How can I keep from getting hepatitis A?**

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is through vaccination with the Hepatitis A vaccine. Vaccination is recommended for all children, for travelers to certain countries, and for people at high risk for infection with the virus or for particularly severe disease from it. Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing food can help prevent the spread of hepatitis A.

**Is the hepatitis A vaccine required for school law?** Hepatitis A vaccination is required for:

- Children 18 months and older in preschool, Head Start, child care and kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade this school year (2012-2013).
- Children 18 months and older in preschool, Head Start, child care and kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade next school year (2013-2014).
- Children 18 months and older in preschool, Head Start, child care and kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade the following school year (2014-2015).

Ninety-four percent of children in preschool, Head Start and certified child care programs in Oregon have at least one dose of hepatitis A vaccine. Ninety-two percent of children in kindergarten in Oregon have two doses of hepatitis A vaccine.

**What is Oregon Public Health doing?** Oregon Public Health is working with local health departments, other state health departments, the CDC and the FDA to investigate the outbreak. The investigation is ongoing.

**Where can I get more information?** For more information, visit:

- [www.healthoregon.org/news](http://www.healthoregon.org/news)
- CDC hepatitis A outbreak website: [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/Outbreaks/2013/A1b-03-31/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/Outbreaks/2013/A1b-03-31/index.html)
- CDC hepatitis A information page: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/A/index.htm>
- FDA hepatitis A outbreak website: [www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/Outbreaks/ucm354698.htm](http://www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/Outbreaks/ucm354698.htm)