

Hepatitis A Outbreak

Talking Points

(updated June 4, 2013)

The investigation

- The Oregon Public Health Division is working with local health departments, the CDC and the FDA to investigate an outbreak of hepatitis A in five Western states, including California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada and Arizona.
- The outbreak has sickened 30 people who are believed to have eaten Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend, a frozen berry product.
- Because of the vaccine, hepatitis A has become rare in the United States, although travelers to developing countries are at risk. This outbreak was solved by alert public health officials in New Mexico, who noticed a couple of cases in people who hadn't traveled out of the country, interviewed them extensively, and made the connection with berries that was later confirmed in other states.
- At this time, the Oregon Public Health Division is not aware of any cases of hepatitis A in Oregon connected to this outbreak, although the division is working to confirm the origins of all recent cases of disease. There are no deaths believed to be linked to the outbreak.
- The frozen berry product is sold at many stores, including Costco. The retail chain has pulled the product from its store shelves.
- Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend (3 lb bag) is produced by Townsend Farms Inc. based in Fairview, Ore. The company is voluntarily recalling certain lots of its frozen organic antioxidant blend because it has the potential of contamination. The product is also sold under the name Harris Teeter Organic Berry Blend, 10 oz bag.
- The packages contain a variety of berries that includes cherries, blueberries, pomegranate seeds, raspberries and strawberries.

- The Oregon Public Health Division has not determined whether any berries packaged by Townsend Farms for its Organic Antioxidant Blend were grown in Oregon. According to the CDC, the package label indicates the produce used for the product come from the U.S., Argentina, Chile and Turkey.
- The source of the contamination of the berries is unknown at this point.
- Hepatitis A is a human disease and usually occurs when an infected food handler prepares food without appropriate hand hygiene. However, food contaminated with HAV, as is suspected in this outbreak, can cause outbreaks of disease among persons who eat or handle food.
- 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.
- It is currently unknown how many packages of Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend were distributed to stores in Oregon.

About hepatitis A

- Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease in humans that results from infection with the Hepatitis A virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months.
- Hepatitis A is usually spread when a person ingests fecal matter — even in microscopic amounts — from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the feces, or stool, of an infected person. However, foodborne cases are fairly uncommon; usually, it's contracted through living with someone who has it – household contact – where there are many (non-food) opportunities for fecal-oral transmission.
- 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, HAV infection can progress to liver failure and death. Persons with underlying liver conditions should be vaccinated.
- Hepatitis A disease begins 15–50 days (usually about 4 weeks) after exposure to the virus.

How to protect yourself

- Throw away any Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend frozen berry product you have in your freezer or refrigerator.
- Talk to a health care provider about getting the hepatitis A vaccine if you have eaten any Townsend Farms Organic Antioxidant Blend in the last two weeks. If it has been more than two weeks, vaccine will no longer work.
- Now is a great time to make sure your child has received two doses of hepatitis A vaccine. Hepatitis A vaccine will be required for children in preschool, child care and kindergarten through 5th grade in the coming school year (2013-2014). Students starting grades 6-11 this fall will be required to have hepatitis A vaccine the following school year (2014-2015). Check with your child's health care provider to see if your child or teenager needs hepatitis A vaccine. Update your child's immunization record with the school when your child receives the vaccine.
- 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.

When to see a health care provider

- Hepatitis A illness occurs within 15 to 50 days of exposure.
- If you do not get the hepatitis A vaccine within two weeks of eating the frozen berry product, hepatitis A is not likely to be prevented. Hepatitis A vaccine may prevent disease, but only if given within two weeks of eating the frozen berry product.
- If you ate the frozen berry product more than two weeks ago, look for symptoms of hepatitis. Not everyone gets symptoms. Symptoms may include:
 - Fever
 - Fatigue
 - Loss of appetite
 - Nausea
 - Vomiting
 - Abdominal pain
 - Dark urine
 - Clay-colored bowel movements
 - Joint pain
 - Jaundice (a yellowing of the skin or eyes)

Hepatitis A vaccination

- 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. 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.
- The hepatitis A vaccine is a shot of inactive Hepatitis A virus that stimulates the body's natural immune system. After the vaccine is given, the body makes antibodies that protect a person against the virus. An antibody is a substance found in the blood that is produced in response to a virus invading the body. These antibodies are then stored in the body and will fight off the infection if a person is exposed to the virus in the future.
- Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for:
 - All children at age 1 year.
 - Travelers to countries that have high rates of Hepatitis A.
 - Men who have sexual contact with other men.
 - Users of injection and non-injection illegal drugs.
 - People with chronic (lifelong) liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
 - People who are treated with clotting-factor concentrates.
 - People who work with Hepatitis A infected animals or in a Hepatitis A research laboratory.
- Hepatitis A vaccination is required for:
 - Children 18 months and older in preschool, Head Start, child care and kindergarten through 4th grade this school year (2012-2013).
 - Children 18 months and older in preschool, Head Start, child care and kindergarten through 5th grade next school year (2013-2014).
 - Children 18 months and older in preschool, Head Start, child care and kindergarten through 12th 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.

- The hepatitis A vaccine is given as two shots, six months apart. The hepatitis A vaccine also comes in a combination form, containing both Hepatitis A and B vaccine, that can be given to persons 18 years of age and older. This form is given as 3 shots, over a period of 6 months.
- The hepatitis A vaccine is highly effective in preventing Hepatitis A virus infection. Protection begins approximately 2 to 4 weeks after the first injection. A second injection results in long-term protection.
- The Hepatitis A vaccine is safe. No serious side effects have resulted from the Hepatitis A vaccine. Soreness at the injection site is the most common side effect reported. As with any medicine, there are very small risks that a serious problem could occur after someone gets the vaccine. However, the potential risks associated with Hepatitis A are much greater than the potential risks associated with the Hepatitis A vaccine. Before the Hepatitis A vaccine became available in the United States, more than 250,000 people were infected with Hepatitis A virus each year. Since the licensure of the first Hepatitis A vaccine in 1995, millions of doses of Hepatitis A vaccine have been given in the United States and worldwide.
- People who have ever had a serious allergic reaction to the Hepatitis A vaccine or who are known to be allergic to any part of the Hepatitis A vaccine should not receive the vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies. Also, the vaccine is not licensed for use in infants under age 1 year.
- Anyone traveling to or working in countries with high rates of Hepatitis A should talk to a health professional about getting vaccinated. He or she is likely to recommend vaccination or a shot of immune globulin before traveling to countries in Central or South America, Mexico, and certain parts of Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. CDC's Travelers' Health site provides detailed information about Hepatitis A and other recommended vaccines at wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCH4-HepA.aspx.

About immune globulin

- Immune globulin is a substance made from human blood plasma that contains antibodies that protect against infection. It is given as a shot and provides short-term protection (approximately 3 months) against Hepatitis A. Immune globulin can be given either before exposure to the Hepatitis A virus (such as before travel to a country where Hepatitis A is common) or to prevent infection after exposure to the Hepatitis A virus. Immune globulin must be given within 2 weeks after exposure for the best protection.

For more information, visit:

- www.Healthoregon.org/news
- CDC hepatitis A outbreak website: 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

