

# Hepatitis A

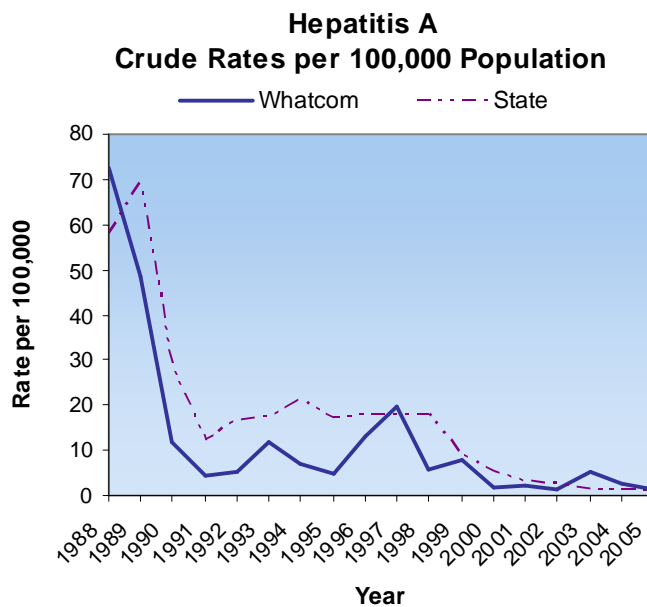
## Why is Hepatitis A important?

Hepatitis A is an acute viral infection of the liver. Infection may cause fever, anorexia, nausea, abdominal pain and jaundice. The virus is present in the feces of an infected person two weeks before and up to two weeks after symptoms begin. The disease is spread to others either person-to-person (including sexual contact) or by consumption of contaminated water or food (including raw or undercooked shellfish).

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. A specific vaccine is available and recommended to prevent hepatitis A. Infection with the virus provides lifelong immunity. Chronic hepatitis A does not occur.

## How are we doing?

The following chart and accompanying table provide Whatcom County and Washington State hepatitis A crude incidence rates and number of cases for 1988 through 2005.



Year	Whatcom County		Washington State	
	Rate per 100,000 Population	# of Cases	Rate per 100,000 Population	# of Cases
1988	72.6	87	57.8	2,667
1989	48.5	60	69.2	3,273
1990	11.7	15	28.4	1,380
1991	4.5	6	12.1	608
1992	5.1	7	16.8	865
1993	12.0	17	17.6	926
1994	6.9	10	20.9	1,119
1995	4.7	7	17.1	937
1996	13.1	20	18.0	1,001
1997	19.7	31	18.0	1,019
1998	5.6	9	18.0	1,037
1999	7.9	13	8.6	502
2000	1.8	3	5.1	300
2001	2.3	4	3.1	184
2002	1.2	2	2.7	162
2003	5.2	9	1.2	76
2004	2.8	5	1.1	69
2005	1.1	2	1.0	63

*The Report Card on Health in Washington 2005* noted that Washington State received a letter grade of “A” in preventing hepatitis A, compared to the United States as a whole. Whatcom County and the State rates of hepatitis A have declined steadily since the late 1980’s, as is evident from the downward trend shown in the graph. In 2005, rates were at an all-time low for both Whatcom County and Washington State.

**What remains to be done?**

Over the past few years, Washington State and the Whatcom County Health Department have worked aggressively to reduce the chances of food workers transmitting hepatitis A. Since 2004 there has been an increased effort to assure that food workers do not have direct contact with ready-to-eat foods. Recent case numbers indicate that these efforts are effective. Providing two doses of hepatitis A vaccine to all recommended populations is an important prevention strategy. The following are other recommended prevention guidelines.

**HEPATITIS A PREVENTION GUIDELINES:**

**Here's how you can protect your family .....**

- ❖ *The single, most effective way to avoid illness is to wash your hands often with soap and water. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom, after changing diapers, and before handling food or beverages.*



- ❖ *The risk of illness from consuming raw shellfish is estimated to be 1,000 times greater than from eating cooked shellfish. If you choose to eat raw molluscan shellfish, purchase them from reputable commercial sources or harvest them from an approved beach.*



- ❖ *Don't drink contaminated water. Pay attention to health advisories and "boil water" notices. To ensure your drinking water is safe during "boil water" notices, always boil, filter, or use bottled water. Also, use this water for washing dishes, fruits, and vegetables*



- ❖ *Clean surfaces where diapers are changed after every use.*



- ❖ *Never prepare food for other people if you have diarrhea*
- ❖ *The hepatitis A vaccine can provide long-term protection against the disease. See the accompanying FACT SHEET for information about being vaccinated against hepatitis A.*