

## GOING ABROAD?

### TAKE THE HEPATITIS A VACCINE: PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILDREN!

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends everyone over the age of one, travelling to risk areas of hepatitis A, to take the vaccine.

Hepatitis A is an inflammation of the liver, caused by a virus. 90% of the children in high-risk countries, such as India and tropical Africa, are infected and ill by their tenth birthday. Moderate or high-risk countries also include Russia, the Baltic countries, and countries in the Mediterranean region (see the map below).

Hepatitis A is most often transmitted through food products or water that have been contaminated with faeces. The virus can also be transmitted as contact infection directly from one person to another, or via toilet facilities.

The first symptoms of hepatitis A include slight fever, loss of appetite, nausea, stomach pain, and dark urine. Approximately one week after the first symptoms, the eyes and skin begin to turn a yellowish shade. Small children, particularly those still wearing diapers, may be asymptomatic but can spread the disease in day care centres.

No medication exists for hepatitis A. The disease usually heals by itself, given time. However, adults may take months to be completely healed, due to prolonged tiredness caused by the illness. Some people develop a severe infection of the liver. This risk is increased by pregnancy, certain underlying illnesses, and high age. People who have suffered hepatitis A do not remain carriers of the disease.

Vaccinations against hepatitis A include the hepatitis A vaccine and the combination vaccine, which also protects from hepatitis B. The series of vaccines provides a lifetime protection against both types. The vaccine is bought from the pharmacy by prescription from a doctor.

