

Hepatitis A outbreak associated with frozen berries

Chief Health Officer Alert

Status:	Active
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Issued by:	Dr Brett Sutton, Deputy Chief Health Officer (Communicable Disease), Victoria
Issued to:	Health professionals, Laboratories

Key messages

- **An outbreak of hepatitis A virus infection** has been identified to be potentially linked to the consumption of Creative Gourmet frozen mixed berries in 300 g packs. The product has been recalled as a precaution.
- **Please advise patients not to consume any recalled product** and advise patients to discard or return the product to point of sale for a refund.
- **Do not vaccinate for hepatitis A because of frozen berry consumption.**
- **Check if your patient has a routine indication for hepatitis A vaccine before immunising.**
- **Do not test well patients** for hepatitis A virus infection, as tests are not useful until symptoms have developed.
- **Take blood for hepatitis A total antibody and Hepatitis A IgM antibody and liver function tests** in patients who have symptoms compatible with hepatitis A virus infection in the 15-50 days after consumption of frozen berries from this product line. Compatible symptoms are two or more of fever, malaise, abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, nausea or clinical signs of jaundice, including dark urine.
- **Only order blood PCR testing for hepatitis A if there is hepatitis A serology consistent with acute infection OR there is clinical evidence of hepatitis**, such as jaundice. The cost of PCR will be borne by the patient unless these criteria are met.
- **Notify any suspected case of hepatitis A infection** to the department immediately by calling 1300 651 160 so that timely prophylaxis of contacts can be provided.

What is the issue?

The consumption of Creative Gourmet frozen mixed berries in 300 g packs with a best before date of 15 January 2021 has potentially been linked with an outbreak of hepatitis A infection. As of 2 June 2017, Australian health authorities have identified four cases of hepatitis A infection that were acquired in Australia in 2017 and involve the affected strain of hepatitis A virus. One of these cases is an individual who resides in Victoria. As a precaution, a recall of the product concerned was triggered on 2 June 2017.

Consumers have been warned to avoid eating this recalled product as it may potentially be contaminated with hepatitis A virus. Creative Gourmet frozen mixed berries 300 g packets are processed in China and distributed through IGA and Foodworks supermarkets by Entyce Food Ingredients, based in Victoria.

Product recall details are available at: www.foodstandards.gov.au/industry/foodrecalls/recalls/

No other Creative Gourmet products are affected by this food recall. There are no other frozen berry products affected by this recall.

Who is at risk?

Anyone who has consumed Creative Gourmet frozen mixed berries 300 g packs with a best-before date of 15 January 2021 may be at risk.

Symptoms and transmission

Hepatitis A virus infection can take between 15 to 50 days to develop following exposure to the virus.

Hepatitis A virus infection is uncommon, and normally associated with travel to countries affected by endemic hepatitis A. Hepatitis A is spread when traces of faecal matter containing the virus contaminate hands, objects, water or food and are then taken in by mouth.

Illness due to hepatitis A typically causes acute fever, malaise, anorexia, nausea and abdominal discomfort. This can be followed a few days later by dark urine and jaundice. Symptoms usually last several weeks although convalescence may sometimes be prolonged. Severe illness may occasionally occur particularly when hepatitis A infection complicates pre-existing liver disease. Infants and young children infected with hepatitis A virus may have a mild illness with few or no symptoms, with jaundice often being absent.

Prevention and treatment

- The recalled berry product should not be consumed.
- Individuals who have consumed the berries and are well do not require testing or vaccination. This is because the absolute risk of exposure to hepatitis A virus from consumption of frozen berries from the product affected is extremely low, and any vaccine taken for the purposes of post-exposure prophylaxis would be ineffective in preventing illness from that exposure if provided more than 14 days after the exposure takes place.
- The department may recommend vaccination for close contacts of a confirmed case of hepatitis A virus infection or if there is a **routine indication for hepatitis A vaccine**, such as:
 - travellers (≥ 1 year of age) to hepatitis A endemic areas
 - persons with chronic liver disease, liver solid organ transplant recipients and/or those chronically infected with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C viruses
 - persons whose occupation puts them at increased risk of acquiring hepatitis A
 - persons whose lifestyle puts them at increased risk of acquiring hepatitis A including persons who engage in anal intercourse, men who have sex with men, persons who inject drugs (including inmates of correctional facilities) and sex industry workers are at increased risk of acquiring hepatitis A
 - persons with developmental disabilities
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children residing in the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia.

Testing

- Take a serum blood tube for Hepatitis A total antibody and Hepatitis A IgM antibody and liver function tests in patients who have symptoms compatible with hepatitis A virus infection in the 15–50 days after consumption of frozen berries from the recalled product line. Compatible symptoms are two or more of fever, malaise, abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, nausea, jaundice or dark urine.
- Only order blood PCR testing for hepatitis A if there is hepatitis A serology consistent with acute infection OR there is clinical evidence of hepatitis, such as jaundice. The cost of PCR will be borne by the patient unless these criteria are met.

More information

Clinical information

- [The Blue Book – Hepatitis A](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/infectious-diseases/disease-information-advice/hepatitis-a) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/infectious-diseases/disease-information-advice/hepatitis-a>

Consumer information

- [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-a) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-a>
- [Hepatitis Victoria](http://www.hepvic.org.au) <www.hepvic.org.au>

Contacts

For more information please contact the Communicable Disease Prevention and Control section at the Department of Health and Human Services on 1300 651 160 (24 hours).



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