Watch Your Hep

January 1, 2000 By Lark Lands, PhD

(HEALTH TIP)—Hepatitis A is certainly no fun—it can cause flulike symptoms, gastrointestinal misery and liver damage. Yet the viral culprit—most commonly transmitted through contaminated food, particularly raw seafood, and oral-anal sex—is generally viewed as the least lethal in the hep family, seldom requiring hospitalization. For that reason, many HIVers overlook the importance of vaccinating against it. But a new study by University of Texas and University of Colorado researchers shows that the impact of this coinfection may be severe. Of 35 HIVers who contracted hep A, only four (11 percent) were hospitalized, but 28 (80 percent) had to interrupt HAART for an average of 57 days, due to med-heightened liver toxicity and/or nausea or vomiting precluding adequate dosing. Of the interrupters, one-quarter failed to achieve acceptable viral load suppression when they resumed their earlier combo and had to switch regimens—trouble for those with few options. Equally disturbing, the HIV–hep A coinfected had a significantly higher HIV viral load than those in the control group, even a full year after the hep A infection. The researchers recommend vaccinations for HIVers not immune through previous exposure to hep A (via infection or vaccine).

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