

Panel: Adopting from abroad? Get hepatitis A shot

ATLANTA, Wed Feb 25, 12:55 PM

A 51-year-old adoptive grandmother's death from hepatitis has helped spur new vaccination recommendations for people in close contact with children adopted from other countries.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, meeting in Atlanta, voted Wednesday to recommend hepatitis A vaccinations for all close contacts of children coming from countries where hepatitis A is relatively common. That includes Guatemala, China, Russia and Ethiopia — four countries that are currently the major sources of international adoptions. The committee makes recommendations to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Federal officials estimate that international adoptees trigger only 100 to 1,000 of the estimated 32,000 hepatitis A infections that occur in the United States each year. But cases that do occur are sometimes tragic.

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by a virus, which can spread through handling a diaper or other contact with contaminated feces. Federal guidelines call for vaccinations against it for all U.S. children and for adults who travel to countries where the illness is common.

The two-dose vaccination costs about \$140 per person. International adoptions tend to cost \$20,000 to \$40,000, said Dr. Cindy Weinbaum, a CDC viral hepatitis expert.

Children adopted from other countries generally do not have recommended vaccinations when they arrive. They undergo physical examinations, but infected young children often don't have the jaundice considered a sign of the illness, CDC officials said.

Non-traveling family members of the new adoptee often aren't vaccinated either. A CDC official told the panel a 2007 international adoption of twins caused the death of a 51-year-old woman in Minnesota. Another last year put two adults in the hospital and prompted school vaccination clinics in a Maine community.

The panel's recommendation is targeted at family members, baby sitters and others who come in close contact with an international adoptee within 60 days of the child's arrival in the United States. Ideally, people should get the first dose at least two weeks before the parents bring the child home, health officials said.