



Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a self-limited liver infection caused by Hepatitis A virus.

How is it spread?

- Putting something in your mouth that has been infected (food or water) with the feces of a person with Hepatitis A infection
- Some sexual activities may expose you to Hepatitis A.
- Close contact with an infected person

Most infections result from contact with a household member or sexual partner who is infected with Hepatitis A.

How is Hepatitis A NOT spread?

- You can't get Hepatitis A from casual contact.
- Hepatitis A spread from infected mothers to newborn infants is rare.
- Urine and respiratory secretions are unlikely to spread the virus.
- Rarely is it spread by blood.

If you are infected with Hepatitis A, you are generally most contagious two weeks before symptoms. Typically you are no longer infectious seven days after onset of jaundice.

What symptoms should I watch for?

Small children usually have no or mild symptoms. Older children and adults in general have fever, a general feeling of being unwell, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal discomfort, followed within a few days by jaundice (yellowness of the skin and/or eyes). Dark urine and light-coloured stools, as well as severe itching of the skin may occur. These symptoms usually appear 28 to 30 days after you are exposed to the virus, but may appear as early as 15 days or as long as 50 days after exposure.

Illness may last from one to two weeks, and some people may have a relapsing illness.

Death from Hepatitis A infection is rare.

Most people recover completely with life-long immunity to Hepatitis A. However, for people with chronic liver disease such as Hepatitis B or C, infection with another virus such as Hepatitis A can be a serious health risk.

How do I get tested for Hepatitis A?

A special blood test is done.

What is the treatment for Hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A. Post exposure prophylaxis treatment may be available through vaccination, ideally within 14 days of exposure.

People with Hepatitis A should stay home and rest until they feel better. Alcoholic beverages should not be consumed during early infection. Household members and sexual contacts should be vaccinated against Hepatitis A. Make sure to see your health care provider for further guidance and information.

How do I protect myself and others?

- Hepatitis A vaccine and immunoglobulin are available to protect you against infection. For details on their use before or after exposure to the Hepatitis A virus, as well as information on who should or should **not** receive the vaccine or immunoglobulin, please contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit or see your health care provider.
- Good personal hygiene, including frequent and proper hand washing after using the toilet (and diapering children) and before handling food, are important measures to reduce the spread of Hepatitis A infection. The virus may be present in stool for several months after start of symptoms, even if you are feeling better.
- People with Hepatitis A should avoid preparing food for others.
- Take precautions when travelling in countries where hygiene and sanitation may be inadequate.
 - a) Make sure fresh fruits and vegetables have been washed with clean water or peel them yourself.
 - b) When eating cooked foods, make sure they are still hot when they are served.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809

- c) Avoid beverages or ice that may have been prepared with untreated water.
- d) Wash hands before eating or drinking.

Is there anything special I need to know?

Food handlers, health care workers, child care staff and/or children confirmed to be infected with Hepatitis A virus should not return to work, school or child care centre until;

- Two weeks after symptoms have appeared
- or
- Seven days after jaundice appears
- or
- Vaccination for contacts is complete
- or
- Directed by the health unit

Hepatitis A Vaccine

Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended to prevent infection. It is a two dose series.

Hepatitis A vaccine may be part of a three dose combined vaccine which also includes Hepatitis B vaccine--this is called Twinrix.

Vaccine is free from the health unit if:

- You are a man who has sex with other men.
- You have a chronic liver disease such as Hepatitis B or C.
- Intravenous drug use
- People who have been exposed to the Hepatitis A virus through an outbreak