



Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the Hepatitis A virus.

How is it spread?

The Hepatitis A virus is very contagious. People who are infected with Hepatitis A pass the virus in their stool and may contaminate food, drink, surfaces and objects that you come into contact with every day.

An infected food handler who does not properly wash their hands may contaminate foods during preparation or serving. You may also be exposed to the virus if you are in direct contact with the stool of an infected person and then do not wash your hands thoroughly. For example, changing diapers of children or seniors.

In addition, some sexual activities may expose you to Hepatitis A. The virus can also be ingested by drinking or swimming in contaminated water.

What are the symptoms?

Small children usually have mild or no symptoms. Older children and adults in general may experience 1 to 7 days of 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 symptoms on and off for weeks. Once you recover from Hepatitis A, you cannot get it again. 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.

What is the treatment for Hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A. People with Hepatitis A should stay home and rest until they feel better. Alcoholic beverages should not be consumed during the early part of infection.

How do I protect myself and others?

The best way to prevent Hepatitis A is through vaccination with the Hepatitis A vaccine. Vaccination is recommended for all children, for travellers to certain countries, and for people at high risk for infection with the virus.

Other ways to prevent Hepatitis A include:

- 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.
- Take precautions when travelling in countries where hygiene and sanitation may be inadequate.
- Make sure fresh fruits and vegetables have been washed with clean water or peel them yourself prior to eating.
- When eating cooked foods, make sure they are still hot when they are served.
- Avoid beverages or ice that may have been prepared with untreated water.

Is there anything special I need to know?

If you have Hepatitis A, and you are a food handler, healthcare, child care worker or a caregiver, you should not go to work while you are having symptoms. In addition, you may have to stop working for 1 to 2 weeks after symptoms start. Children in child care settings who have Hepatitis A may also need to stay home for a period of time after symptoms start.

Hepatitis A Vaccine

The risk of a serious reaction or side effect from this vaccine is much less than the risk of having hepatitis A. For more information on the [Hepatitis A vaccine](#), please contact the Immunization Program at extension 8806.