



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 the virus can get on 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 spread the virus to foods they touch. You may also be exposed to the virus if you are in direct contact with the stool of an ill 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 get into your body by drinking or swimming in water that has the virus.

What are the symptoms?

Small children usually have mild or no symptoms. Older children and adults may have 1 to 7 days of fever, a general feeling of being unwell, loss of appetite, nausea and stomach pain, then a few days later have 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 come in contact with the virus, but may show up as early as 15 days or as long as 50 days after you come in contact with the virus.

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. You should not drink alcoholic beverages during the early part of illness.

How do I protect myself and others?

The best way to prevent Hepatitis A is through immunization with the Hepatitis A vaccine. Immunization is recommended for all children, for travellers to certain countries, and for people at high risk for infection with the virus (e.g. food handlers).

Other ways to prevent Hepatitis A include:

- Good personal hygiene, including proper hand washing after using the toilet (and diapering children) and before handling food;
- Watching what you eat and drink when traveling to countries where hygiene and sanitation may be of concern;
- 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 worker, 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 effects from this vaccine is much less than the possible effects of having Hepatitis A. For more information on the [Hepatitis A vaccine](#), please contact the Immunization Program at extension 8806.

For more information call the Infectious Diseases Team:

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