

Fact Sheet: Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A can cause liver swelling and damage. Most people recover without any problems, although they may be sick for several weeks.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Stomach tenderness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice)
- Dark colored urine
- Clay-colored or pale bowel movements
- Joint pain

Symptoms usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after exposure to the virus. It is common for infected children to have no symptoms at all. Anyone who has hepatitis A can pass the disease to others for 1-2 weeks before symptoms appear and for about a week after the jaundice (yellowing of the skin) appears.

How is it spread?

The hepatitis A virus is spread by the fecal-oral route. This means that you must get something in your mouth that is contaminated with feces from an infected person. Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A. People who share injection and non-injection street drugs (including pain killers) are also more likely to get hepatitis A. Infection can also result from eating food or drink that is contaminated with the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A is not spread by sneezes or coughs.

How is it treated?

If you have been exposed to hepatitis A virus, Hepatitis A vaccine and/or immune globulin should be given as soon as possible and no more than 2 weeks after exposure to be effective. If you think you have been exposed, call your doctor immediately.

Infected people should:

- Get lots of rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after using the toilet.
- NOT share towels, washcloths or soap.
- NOT share eating utensils.
- NOT make or handle food that will be eaten by others until at least 2 weeks after their jaundice appears or symptoms are gone.

If you are a food-service worker, a health-care worker, or a day-care worker report your illness to your supervisor and do not work until your illness is over and your medical provider says it is OK to return to work.

How is it prevented?

- You should always wash your hands after using the toilet, changing a diaper, and before eating or preparing food.
- Vaccine is the best protection against hepatitis A for anyone at high risk.
- A two dose series of Hepatitis A vaccine is now recommended for all children 12-24 months of age.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

