

Fact Sheet: Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A can cause damage to the liver and create other health problems. Most people recover without any problems, although it may take several weeks to feel “normal” again.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Stomach tenderness
- Nausea, vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes
- Dark colored urine
- Clay-colored (gray) bowel movements

Symptoms usually appear from 28 days after exposure to the virus, and from 15-50 days with children younger than 6 years of age. 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. Sometimes, infection results 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?

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

Infected people should:

- Get lots of bed rest.
- Eat a well balanced diet.
- Drink fluids (fruit juices and water).
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after using the toilet.

Infected people should not:

- Share towels, washcloths or soap.
- Share eating utensils.
- 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.
- Vaccines are also available for long-term protection against hepatitis A.
- 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 call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

