

# Hepatitis A

## What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). The virus is found in the stool of people who are infected with hepatitis A.

## Who Usually Gets Hepatitis A?

Anyone of any age can get hepatitis A. Proper sanitation, good handwashing and good personal hygiene can help prevent infection. There is a vaccine for hepatitis A.

## How is Hepatitis A Spread?

The infection is spread by:

- putting something in the mouth that has had contact with the stool from an infected person
- having sexual contact with an infected person
- living in the same household with an infected person.

Hepatitis A cannot be spread by casual contact (such as a hug or handshake).

## Who is at Risk for Hepatitis A?

People at risk for hepatitis A are those who:

- share a household or have sexual contact with an infected person
- travel to developing countries that have poor sanitary conditions or where hepatitis A is common
- use illegal (street) drugs

- work in or attend child care centers where a child or employee has hepatitis A
- work or live in institutions where a resident or employee has hepatitis A.

Other people at risk include men who have sex with men, people who work with hepatitis A virus in a lab or who handle infected animals, and people who have clotting disorders (such as hemophilia).

## What are the Symptoms of Hepatitis A?

Most adults who have hepatitis A have symptoms that develop over several days. Symptoms include:

- jaundice (yellowing)
- dark urine
- tiredness
- appetite loss or not wanting to eat
- nausea (feel like throwing up), vomiting (throwing up), fever or stomach ache.

Children often do not have symptoms.

## Are There Long-term Effects of Hepatitis A?

There is no long-term infection. Once you recover from hepatitis A, you will never get it again.

*(over)*

## How is Hepatitis A Found?

A blood test will confirm hepatitis A.

## How is Hepatitis A Treated?

There is no specific treatment.

## How Long can the Hepatitis A Virus be Spread?

The hepatitis A virus can be spread about 2 weeks before symptoms appear and during the first week of symptoms. The virus can still be spread even if no symptoms are present.

## Is There a Vaccine for Hepatitis A?

Yes. The hepatitis A vaccine is available to anyone 12 months old and older.

- For long-term protection (about 20 years), people need 2 shots of the vaccine. Protection begins 4 weeks after the first shot.
  - Consider the vaccine if you are in the at-risk group listed on the front side of this fact sheet.
- There are hepatitis A antibodies (immune globulin) that can be given for short-term protection in people who have already been exposed to the virus.
  - It must be given within 2 weeks of exposure for the best possible protection.
  - This can be given to children younger than 12 months old who may be traveling to countries where hepatitis A is a risk to someone who can't have the hepatitis A vaccine.
  - Check with your health care provider for additional information.

The most common side effect of the hepatitis A vaccine is soreness at the shot site.

## How can You Prevent the Spread of Hepatitis A?

To prevent the spread of hepatitis A:

- Wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, after changing a diaper, and before and after preparing food. (Parents should stress proper handwashing habits to their children.)
- Take precautions when traveling to avoid drinking contaminated water or ice.
- Avoid raw shellfish that comes from water that has sewage in it.
- Avoid eating unwashed fruits, vegetables or other foods that may have been contaminated during handling.

## How Long Should Infected People Stay Home From Work or School?

You can return to work or school when you feel well. Food handlers and health care workers may have extra restrictions.

## Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.