

# Hepatitis A Fact Sheet



## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease. It is caused by the Hepatitis A virus (HAV).

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually start within six weeks after being infected. They include:

- Yellow eyes (jaundice)
- Dark urine
- Nausea
- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Stomach ache
- Vomiting

Children rarely show symptoms of infection. Three of every four adults will have symptoms which develop over several days.

## How is hepatitis A spread?

HAV is found in the stool (bowel movement). It is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the infected stool.

Poor personal hygiene and poor sanitation are the most common causes of HAV. Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A. Casual contact (school, office or factory setting) does not spread the virus.

A person can spread HAV about one week before symptoms are seen and during the first week of symptoms. People with no symptoms can also spread HAV.

**Note:** A person who has symptoms of jaundice or been diagnosed with hepatitis A should not work as a food handler or take care of patients, children or senior citizens.

## How is hepatitis A diagnosed and treated?

A blood test done by your doctor is needed to diagnose hepatitis A.

There is no special treatment for hepatitis A infection. Infected people should get a lot of bed rest, eat a balanced diet, drink fluids, avoid alcohol, and wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after using the bathroom.

Infected people should not share towels, washcloths, or soap, share eating utensils, or make or handle food that will be eaten by others until at least two weeks after their jaundice appears or symptoms are gone.

## Is hepatitis A serious?

Symptoms usually last less than two months. In a few cases, people can be sick for as long as six months.

Unlike hepatitis B and hepatitis C, hepatitis A does not cause any long-term liver damage. It usually does not cause death. Once a person has recovered from HAV, he will never get HAV again. In a few cases, there can be more serious complications which may require hospitalization.

## How can hepatitis A be prevented?

To prevent hepatitis A:

- Wash your hands after using the bathroom.

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- Wash your hands after changing a diaper.
- Wash your hands before and after making or eating food.
- Wash fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Cook shellfish completely.
- Immune globulin can be given before exposure for short-term protection against hepatitis A. It is also given to people who have been exposed to HAV. Immune globulin must be given within two weeks after exposure for the greatest protection.
- Hepatitis A vaccines provide long-term protection against hepatitis A. They are licensed for use in people two years of age and older.

### Who should get vaccinated against hepatitis A?

The hepatitis vaccination is recommended for the following groups:

- People traveling to or working in countries that have high or intermediate rates of hepatitis A.
- Children in communities with constant higher rates of hepatitis A. The Health Department can tell you whether your area has these higher rates.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People who use illegal (street) drugs.
- People who have chronic liver disease.

- People who have clotting factor disorders such as hemophilia.
- People who work with HAV-infected animals or work with HAV in a research setting.

Hepatitis A vaccine is generally not recommended for health care workers or food service workers.

### How to wash your hands

1. Use warm water and liquid soap.
2. Lather all parts of the hands and rub briskly for 20 seconds. Be sure to include:
  - the backs of your hands
  - between your fingers
  - wrists
3. Use a brush or nail file to clean under your fingernails.
4. Rinse well under warm running water.
5. Dry hands with a paper towel or air dryer. Don't use a cloth towel.
6. Turn off the water using the paper towel instead of your clean hands.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about hepatitis A or think you may have it, call your health care provider.*