

HEPATITIS A FACTSHEET

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What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A (formerly known as infectious hepatitis) is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV is found in the stool of persons with hepatitis A.

Who gets Hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A. A person who has Hepatitis A can easily pass the disease to others within the same household.

How is the virus spread?

The Hepatitis A virus enters through the mouth, multiplies in the body and is passed in the feces. The virus can then be carried on an infected person's hands and can be spread by direct contact, or by consuming food or drink that has been handled by the individual. The virus can also be spread by eating raw or undercooked mollusks harvested from contaminated waters; and contaminated produce such as lettuce and strawberries. Although rare, instances have been reported of transmission by transfusion of blood and clotting factor concentrates obtained from donors during the incubation period.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

The symptoms of hepatitis A may include fatigue, poor appetite, fever and vomiting. Urine may become darker in color, and then jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of eyes) may appear. The disease is rarely fatal and most people recover in a few weeks without any complications. Infants and young children tend to have very mild symptoms and are less likely to develop jaundice than are older children and adults.

Not everyone who is infected will have symptoms, especially young children.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear two to six weeks after exposure, but usually within three to four weeks.

For how long is an infected person able to spread the virus?

The contagious period begins about a week or so before the symptoms appear, and may extend up to a week after onset of jaundice.

Does past infection with Hepatitis A make a person immune?

Once an individual recovers from Hepatitis A, he or she is immune for life and does not continue to carry the virus.

What is the treatment for Hepatitis A?

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person once the symptoms appear. Generally, bed rest is all that is needed.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

A vaccine is now currently available, and recommended for the following:

- All children 1 year of age (12-23 months)
- Persons 1 year of age and older traveling to countries where Hepatitis A common
- Men who have sex with men
- Persons who use street drugs
- Persons with chronic liver disease
- Persons who are treated with clotting factor concentrates
- Persons who work with HAV infected primates or who work with HAV in research laboratories.

The single most effective way to prevent spread is careful hand washing after using the toilet and before eating. Also, infected people should not handle foods for others during the contagious period. Household members or others in close contact with an infected person should call a doctor or the health department to obtain a shot of immune globulin, which minimizes their chances of becoming ill.

Want more information?

Information about Hepatitis A and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and

