
Hepatitis A

What You Need to Know



What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by a virus.

What are the symptoms?

Some people have no symptoms. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children. Symptoms are abdominal pain, fever, tiredness, loss of appetite and nausea followed by yellowing of the skin and eyes.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

The most common way the disease is spread is from person to person by hands contaminated with feces. Outbreaks may be due to water or food being contaminated with feces; or eating raw or undercooked shellfish, mostly oysters, taken from waters contaminated with the virus.

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

Symptoms may appear from 2-6 weeks after exposure. The average time is about one month.

How long is a person contagious with Hepatitis A?

Most people are contagious for two weeks before symptoms begin and up to one week after the symptoms first appear.

What are the complications of Hepatitis A infection?

Most people recover completely. Death or serious illness may result when a person is also infected with Hepatitis B or C, or other liver disease.

Is there a treatment for Hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A infection. However, it is important to have a doctor follow the course of the infection. The doctor can recommend measures such as rest, change in diet, etc.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

Good sanitation and good hygiene are key to preventing Hepatitis A. Specifically, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

- before eating or preparing food
- after using the bathroom
- after diapering/toileting a small child

There is a vaccine that will prevent Hepatitis A infection. It is recommended for all children, travelers to some foreign countries, and people who are at risk of complications from Hepatitis A infection. The hepatitis A vaccine is a two-dose series, given 6 months apart.

What can be done after a person is possibly exposed to hepatitis A?

If you have been exposed to hepatitis A, it is recommended that you receive the hepatitis A vaccine within 14 days of exposure to prevent illness.

The final, second dose of vaccine is needed 6 months after the first dose to complete the series and better protect you from future exposure to hepatitis A.

Always Practice Healthy Habits:

- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, or turn away when coughing.
- Immediately throw away used tissues, followed by careful hand washing.
- Avoid sharing objects if they have been in the mouth (pacifiers, toys, silverware, etc.); wash objects in hot, soapy water between use.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after coughing, sneezing or touching common surfaces like door knobs, keyboards and telephones. You can also use alcohol-based hand cleaners.



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