

HEPATITIS A FACT SHEET

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

Symptoms usually appear within 28 days of exposure to the virus, with a range of 15-50 days.

It is common for 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 (poop) 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.

More information: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/>

How is it treated?

Hepatitis A vaccine and/or immune globulin should be given as soon as possible and no more than 2 weeks after being exposed. 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
- NOT share towels, washcloths or soap
- NOT share eating utensils
- NOT make or handle food that will be eaten by others until at least 2 weeks after the onset of symptoms

If you are a food-service worker or a day-care worker, report your illness to your supervisor. Do not work until your illness is over and your medical provider says it is OK to return to work.

How is it prevented?

- Always wash your hands after using the toilet, changing a diaper and before eating or preparing food
- Vaccine is 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

