

Hepatitis A



What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious, highly contagious liver disease that results from infection with the hepatitis A virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months.

Spread of Disease

Hepatitis A is usually spread when a person ingests feces (poop)—even in microscopic amounts—from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by feces (poop) from an infected person.

Hepatitis A can be spread when:

- An infected person does not wash his or her hands properly after going to the bathroom and then touches objects or food
- A caregiver does not properly wash his or her hands after changing diapers or cleaning up the feces (poop) of an infected person
- Someone engages in certain sexual activities, such as oral-anal contact with an infected person

Hepatitis A also can be spread through contaminated food or water. This most often occurs in countries where hepatitis A is common, especially if personal hygiene or sanitary conditions are poor. Contamination of food can happen at any point: growing, harvesting, processing, handling, and even after cooking.

Signs and Symptoms

Not everyone has symptoms. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 15 to 50 days after a person becomes infected and can include:

- Fever
- Feeling tired
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Belly pain
- Pale colored feces (poop)
- Dark urine
- Joint pain
- Yellowing of skin and eyes (Jaundice)

Symptoms are more likely to occur in adults than in children.

Treatment and Complications

To treat hepatitis A, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and medical monitoring. Some people will need to be hospitalized. It can take a few months before people begin to feel better.

Most people who get hepatitis A feel sick for several months, but usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage. Sometimes, hepatitis A can cause liver failure and death, although this occurs more commonly in people older than 50 and people with other liver diseases and health issues.

Diagnosis

A doctor can determine if a person has hepatitis A by discussing his or her symptoms and taking a blood sample.

People at Risk

Although anyone can get hepatitis A (HAV), some people are at a greater risk, such as those who:

- Are homeless
- Are in jail
- Use injection and non-injection illegal drugs
- Work with high risk populations listed above
- Have close contact, care for, or live with someone who has HAV
- Engage in sexual activities with someone who has HAV
- Men who have sex with men
- Travel to countries with high or medium rates of HAV
- Have chronic liver disease, such as cirrhosis, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C*
- Persons with clotting factor disorders

*Note: Individuals with chronic liver disease (e.g., cirrhosis and hepatitis C) may not be at increased risk of getting HAV infections, but are at increased risk of having poor outcomes if they are infected with HAV.



Prevention

Food safety, immunization, proper handwashing and improved sanitation are the most effective ways to combat hepatitis A. The spread of hepatitis A can be reduced by:

- Getting vaccinated against hepatitis A
- Washing hands after using restroom and before eating or preparing meals
- Not sharing towels, toothbrushes, food, drinks, drugs, or smokes with others
- Seeking medical care if hepatitis A is suspected
- Cooperating with local public health if diagnosed with hepatitis A to prevent further spread of virus



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhhs
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov
US FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION www.fda.gov