



Hepatitis A Frequently Asked Questions

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that infects and can damage the liver. It is usually passed from one person to another through unsafe food or water, or through sexual contact. There is a vaccine to prevent hepatitis A.

How is the hepatitis A virus spread?

The hepatitis A virus enters the body through the mouth and is passed in the stool (feces). The virus is spread when a person swallows tiny amounts of stool that are too small to be seen. It can be carried on an infected person's hands and spread by touching their hands, consuming food or drink that they handled or through sexual contact.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Symptoms include jaundice (yellowing of eyes and skin), fatigue (feeling tired), stomach pain, nausea and diarrhea. People typically develop symptoms about one month after they are exposed to the virus.

Not everyone who gets hepatitis A will have all these symptoms. Infants and young children tend to have very mild symptoms and are less likely to develop jaundice than older children and adults.

When could I first get sick and when could I spread the infection?

Symptoms usually appear within three to four weeks after exposure, although they can appear as early as two weeks or as late as seven weeks after exposure. An infected person is most likely to spread the virus in the two weeks before and one week after they begin to show symptoms.

What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

There is no treatment for hepatitis A. Most people get better on their own within a few weeks by resting and not drinking alcohol. Some people who have chronic liver disease or a weakened immune system experience more severe illness and require supportive care. While recovering from hepatitis A, **do not** drink alcohol or take drugs that can hurt the liver, such as acetaminophen or Tylenol.

If you believe you may have hepatitis A, talk to your health care provider.

How is hepatitis A diagnosed?

If your health care provider suspects hepatitis A, they can request a blood test.

Can a person get hepatitis A more than once?

No. Once a person recovers from hepatitis A, they are immune (protected) for life and no longer carry the virus.

Can hepatitis A lead to death?

Hepatitis A rarely leads to death (less than 1% of cases).

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

Get the hepatitis A vaccine. Ask your health care provider about getting the hepatitis A vaccine or call 311 to find a vaccine provider.

Wash your hands carefully with soap and warm running water before touching food and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.

Avoid sexual practices that may result in hand or mouth exposure to stool. Condoms help prevent other sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, but may not prevent hepatitis A.

If you travel to a country where hepatitis A is common, use bottled water or boil tap water for one minute before using. Avoid eating shellfish that may have come from a contaminated water source.

Who should get the hepatitis A vaccine?

Anyone who wants lasting protection against hepatitis A should get two doses of the vaccine at least six months apart.

In addition, routine vaccination is recommended for people in the following groups:

- All children between ages 1 and 2 years
- Travelers to areas where hepatitis A is common, including countries in the Caribbean, Central and South America, Africa, Eastern Europe and parts of Asia. Travelers should get the first dose at least two weeks before travel.
- Gay men and other men who have sex with men
- People who have chronic liver disease
- People who use drugs
- People who have clotting-factor disorders
- People who live on the street, in a shelter or otherwise do not have a permanent address
- People who work with hepatitis A in a laboratory