

Hepatitis A General Information

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes an infection of the liver.

How does hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is passed in an infected person's stool (bowel movement). It is usually spread from person to person when the virus from infected stool gets into another person's mouth.

This can happen in many ways. For example, you could eat food that has been prepared by someone with contaminated hands or eat shellfish that has been raised in polluted waters.

A person with hepatitis A virus can spread the virus from two weeks before any symptoms show up until a week after their skin or eyes turn yellow. (This is called "jaundice.") Some infants and children can pass the virus in their stools for longer periods.

Who can get hepatitis A?

Anyone who has not had hepatitis A before can get it.

People at greatest risk for getting hepatitis A include

- people who share the same household with someone who is infected with hepatitis A
- sexual partners of someone who is infected with hepatitis A
- people who travel to countries where hepatitis A is common
- injecting and non-injecting drug users
- people who eat raw or inadequately cooked shellfish

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include:

- diarrhea
- fever
- loss of appetite
- stomach pains
- yellow skin
- yellow eyes

Some adults and many children who are infected with hepatitis A have no symptoms.

What is the treatment?

There is no known treatment for hepatitis A. Most people recover from the illness within a few weeks. Some people take a few months to recover.

How can you prevent hepatitis A?

- Wash hands with soap and water:
 - after using the toilet
 - after changing diapers
 - before touching food and before eating
- Before travelling to a country where hepatitis A is common, consult a travel clinic (call Public Health Services for more information)
- Avoid eating raw shellfish

What if I'm exposed to hepatitis A?

Contact your healthcare provider or Public Health if you come in contact with someone who has hepatitis A.

They may recommend that you receive immune globulin or vaccine. You must have the vaccine within 14 days of contact with the infected person.