



## **What is hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is a virus (HAV) that causes liver disease. In children it may be very mild, but some adults who develop hepatitis A are ill enough to miss about 4 to 6 weeks of work.

## **How is the virus spread?**

HAV is found in the feces (stool) of infected persons. It is spread by direct, close contact and by diaper changing. HAV may be spread by food that has been prepared or handled by infected persons who do not wash their hands carefully. HAV may also be spread by water contaminated with human feces and by the sharing of contaminated drug paraphernalia.

## **What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?**

Many people who get hepatitis A do not develop symptoms. Only 30% of children under 6 years of age develop symptoms while 70% of people 6 years of age or older develop symptoms. If a person does develop symptoms, they might include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain, dark urine, and/or jaundice (yellow eyes and skin).

## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The first symptoms usually appear after about 1 month, but can develop anytime between 2 to 6 weeks after infection.

## **How long can an infected person spread the virus?**

An infected person can spread the virus for 1-2 weeks before symptoms appear and for 1 week after jaundice occurs. With or without symptoms, people with HAV infection can still spread the disease to others.

## **Can a person get hepatitis A again?**

After one infection with HAV, a person cannot get it again. However, there are different kinds of hepatitis; infection with HAV will not protect against getting other types of hepatitis.

## **Is there a vaccine to prevent hepatitis A?**

Yes. It is recommended for persons traveling to areas where the disease is more common, children and adolescents living in areas where HAV is common, men who have sex with men, persons who use street drugs, persons with chronic liver disease, and residents of a community experiencing an outbreak of HAV.

## **What is the treatment for hepatitis A?**

Once a person is ill, there are no special medicines that will help. Generally, bed rest is all that is needed. Since hepatitis is an illness of the liver, infected persons should avoid drinking alcohol or taking drugs or medicines (including aspirin and acetaminophen) without first asking their doctor.

## **What should I do if I think I've been exposed to hepatitis A?**

If you think you have been exposed to HAV because a household member or a sexual contact developed hepatitis A, consult your physician or health department. You may need a shot called immune globulin that can protect you after having been exposed to HAV. The best time to give the shot is as soon as possible (within 2 weeks) after contact with someone who has hepatitis A. If you become ill with hepatitis A, you need to get information from your doctor on how to take care of yourself. Your household and sexual contacts will need immune globulin and possibly hepatitis A vaccine.

## **How can the spread of hepatitis A be stopped?**

Washing your hands helps stop the spread of many diseases including hepatitis A. Even if you get hepatitis A vaccine, keep washing your hands! Make sure you always wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, after changing diapers, before preparing foods, and before eating.