

FACT SHEET

Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is vaccine-preventable liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV) that results in liver swelling and tenderness. Most people recover completely, but death or serious illness can occur.

How is it spread?

You can acquire hepatitis A when you unknowingly eat the virus. The most common way the disease is spread is from person to person by hands contaminated with feces or because of poor personal hygiene when using the toilet. Outbreaks may be due to water or food, such as raw shellfish, fruit, or other undercooked items, being contaminated with feces.

Usually, symptoms occur 2-7 weeks after exposure and last less than 2 months. A person can spread the virus up to 2 weeks before symptoms appear.

What are the symptoms?

- Yellow skin or eyes
- Not wanting to eat
- Upset stomach
- Throwing up
- Stomach pain
- Fever

- Diarrhea
- Joint pain
- Feeling tired
- Dark urine or light-colored stools

How can it be prevented?

Good sanitation and personal hygiene are key to preventing hepatitis A. Wash your hands with soap and warm water before eating or preparing food, after using the bathroom, or after diapering/toileting a small child.

There is a vaccine available to prevent hepatitis A infection, which is also recommended for persons traveling to areas where hepatitis A is common (www.cdc.gov/travel). Persons with acute hepatitis A whose work involves food preparation must avoid such work until they are no longer infectious, to avoid transmitting this disease to others.

How is it treated?

It is important to contact a doctor immediately after a possible exposure, as receiving hepatitis A vaccine within two weeks of exposure may prevent disease. Your doctor may recommend supportive measures such as rest, change in diet, or increase in fluid intake.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.