

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.

Who is at risk for hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A, but those at greater risk include:

- People traveling to countries where hepatitis A infection is common.
- People who are household members or caregivers of a person infected with hepatitis A.
- People who live with or have sex with people who have hepatitis A.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Injection and non-injection drug users.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Symptoms vary from one person to the next, but may include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, pale stools, and jaundice (i.e., yellowing of skin or whites of eyes). Children younger than 6 years of age often have few or no symptoms. Hepatitis A signs and symptoms generally last less than two months. Prolonged or relapsing illness can last up to one year, but this is uncommon.

How soon do symptoms appear?

It can take from 15 to 50 days (average 28 to 30 days) to get sick after being exposed to the hepatitis A virus.

How is hepatitis A spread?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool (feces) of infected people. Hepatitis A is usually spread when the virus is taken in by mouth from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the feces of an infected person. The food and drinks most likely to be contaminated are fruits, vegetables, raw shellfish, and untreated water or ice. Person-to-person transmission is often related to inadequate handwashing after using the bathroom or caring for an infected person (e.g., changing a diaper or cleaning up stool). Unlike other hepatitis viruses, hepatitis A is usually not spread by blood.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

A person infected with hepatitis A is most likely to spread the disease during the two weeks before symptoms begin. Most people stop being contagious one week after symptom onset, although young children can sometimes shed the virus in their stool for up to six months after infection.

How is a person diagnosed?

A blood test is used to diagnose hepatitis A.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment, only supportive care is available once symptoms begin.

Does past infection make a person immune?

Yes, once a person recovers from hepatitis A, they are immune for life.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work, or other activities if they have Hepatitis A?

Yes, children and adults with the disease should be excluded for one week after onset of illness. People who work as food handlers must be excluded until they have been jaundiced for more than one week, experienced symptoms other than jaundice for more than two weeks, or provided written medical documentation from a health practitioner to their employer stating they are free of a hepatitis A infection.

What can be done to prevent the spread of hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A vaccine is currently available and routinely recommended for all children aged 12 to 23 months. Two doses of the vaccine are needed to be fully protected. The vaccine is also recommended for people traveling to or working in a high risk area, men who have sex with men, users of illegal drugs, people who anticipate having close personal contact with an international adoptee from a high risk area, people who have a clotting disorder, those who may be exposed in a research laboratory setting, and those with chronic liver disease. Anyone who wishes to be immune to hepatitis A may also receive the vaccine. As of January 2008, hepatitis A vaccination is required for children aged 12 to 23 months attending early childhood facilities in North Dakota. Prevent the spread of hepatitis A with good hand washing after using the toilet, changing a diaper, or before preparing food. Infected people should not handle or prepare food for others during the contagious period. Household members, child care contacts, or others in close contact with an infected person should call a healthcare provider or their local public health unit to obtain hepatitis A vaccination or immune globulin, which minimizes the chances of becoming ill.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resources:

1. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Children in Out-Of-Home Care]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 132-151.
2. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Hepatitis A]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 391-399.
3. Heymann, D. L. (2015). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 20th Edition*. Hepatitis A. American Public Health Association. 2015: 253-257.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Hepatitis A. www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm.