# Hepatitis A

**Frequently Asked Questions**

### What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis (hep-ah-ty-tis) A is a liver disease. It is caused by infection with the hepatitis A virus.

### Who can get hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A. Some people who are at greater risk of getting hepatitis A include:

- People who live with someone who has hepatitis A
- People who work in child care settings
- Children who go to child care
- Men who have sex with men
- People who travel to countries where hepatitis A is common
- People who use street-drugs (injected or non-injected)
- People who work with the virus, such as in a laboratory

People who have recovered from hepatitis A cannot become infected again. They become immune to the virus.

### How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of infected people. People become infected with hepatitis A by swallowing the virus. This can happen when infected people do not wash their hands properly after using the bathroom and then touch food that is eaten by someone else. This can also happen when child care workers change an infected child's diaper and without washing their hands touch another object, such as a toy, that a child places in his/her mouth.

### What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

People infected with hepatitis A may have no symptoms, or they may have a range of symptoms including:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Poor appetite
- Dark yellow urine
- Stomach pain
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Yellow skin or eyes (jaundice)

Infants and young children tend to have no symptoms or very mild symptoms, yet are often the source of infection to others. Infants and young children are also less likely to develop jaundice than older people.

Symptoms of hepatitis A usually appear within 3 to 4 weeks after infection. They may appear as quickly as 15 days (about 2 weeks) or may take as long as 50 days (about 2 months).

**How is hepatitis A diagnosed?**

Hepatitis A is diagnosed by a blood test that looks for hepatitis A antibodies.

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

Most people fully recover on their own within a few weeks. No specific medications, including antibiotics, are used to treat hepatitis A.

**Can people with hepatitis A pass the illness to others?**

An infected person can spread hepatitis A to others as long as the hepatitis A virus is present in his/her stool. A person can pass the virus to others (contagious) before and after symptoms appear. This means that a person is contagious 1-2 weeks before they have symptoms and one week after the symptoms appear. One of the more common symptoms of hepatitis A is jaundice but other symptoms can occur. There is no chronic (long-term) infection with hepatitis A. People do not become carriers of the hepatitis A virus.

**Is there a vaccine for hepatitis A?**

Yes, there is a vaccine that will prevent someone from getting sick with hepatitis A.

**Who should get the hepatitis A vaccine?**

- All children at age 1 year (12 – 23 months of age)
- Travelers to countries/areas with increased rates of hepatitis A

  (visit http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel for more information)
- Men who have sex with men
- People with existing chronic liver disease or clotting disorders
- People who use injected or non-injected street drugs
- People who may be exposed to hepatitis A virus through their job, such as laboratory workers
- Anyone who wants to protect themselves from getting hepatitis A

Two doses of the vaccine are needed for lasting protection. These doses are given at least six months apart. Travelers to countries where hepatitis A virus is common should start the vaccine series or receive immune globulin (i-myoon glob-ye-lin) before departure. Immune globulin is a product made up of protective antibodies that may help you from becoming sick from hepatitis A if you were exposed.

## What should I do if I think I have been exposed to hepatitis A?

If you think you have been exposed to hepatitis A, see a health care provider right away. Your health care provider may recommend that you receive an injection of hepatitis A vaccine and/or immune globulin. These injections should be given within two weeks of being exposed to the hepatitis A virus. Immune globulin only provides protection for a short-time, it does not provide long-term protection like the hepatitis A vaccine.

## Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

In general, people infected with hepatitis A may return to work or school when they no longer have symptoms, but they must be sure to **carefully wash their hands** after using the bathroom.

Food-handlers, health care workers, child care providers and children who attend child care centers should take special actions to make sure they don't spread the hepatitis A virus to others. Consult your local health department for further advice in these circumstances.

## Can hepatitis A turn into hepatitis B or C?

No, hepatitis A is caused by a different virus from the viruses that cause hepatitis B or C. Also, hepatitis A virus does not turn into the other hepatitis viruses.

## How can hepatitis A be prevented?

- **Always wash hands thoroughly** with soap and water after using the toilet, changing a diaper or helping a child to use the toilet, before preparing food and beverages, and before eating
- Avoid drinking untreated water
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked shellfish (shellfish, such as clams and oysters, may be contaminated if they have been harvested from waters contaminated by sewage containing hepatitis A virus)
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A
- Consult your health care provider if you have been exposed to hepatitis A
- Anyone with diarrhea should not prepare food for others

## Where can I get more information on hepatitis A?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health http://www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention http://www.cdc.gov



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