

Hepatitis A Information Sheet

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious and contagious liver disease caused by a virus. The disease can range from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months. Hepatitis A is not a lifelong infection like other types of hepatitis.

How can you catch Hepatitis A?

People usually get sick with hepatitis A by putting something in their mouth that has touched the feces (poop) of an infected person through foods, drinks, contaminated objects, or sexual contact. It can also be transmitted by eating raw or undercooked shellfish (oysters, clams, mollusks, etc.), drinking contaminated water, or through illegal drug use (whether the drugs are injected or not).

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

Symptoms of hepatitis A infections usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after contact with the virus and may include:

- Abdominal pain
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Tiredness
- Dark urine
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Light or grey colored stools
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)

An infected person is most contagious about two weeks before symptoms appear until about one week after jaundice appears. Young children rarely show severe symptoms, but can still spread the virus.

How can you be treated for Hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. It is usually recommended to maintain good nutrition, get plenty of rest, drink fluids, avoid alcohol and certain medications that affect the liver, such as acetaminophen, and regularly see your healthcare provider. People generally feel sick for a few months. Once a person recovers from their infection, they cannot become infected with hepatitis A virus again.

How can you prevent Hepatitis A?

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is by getting a vaccine series of 2 shots 6 months apart. Other ways to prevent infection include:

- Thorough hand washing with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before eating or preparing foods or drinks.
- Avoid raw or undercooked shellfish.
- Any household contacts that have been exposed should receive an injection from their doctor within two weeks to prevent the disease.