



# Hepatitis A Facts



## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. Most people completely recover from hepatitis A.

## What causes hepatitis A?

Individuals are infected with hepatitis A by swallowing stool from an infected person, or by eating food or water contaminated with the stool of an infected person. Shellfish, such as oysters and mussels, from contaminated water may also carry the hepatitis A virus. Casual contact in workplace and school settings does not usually spread the virus.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Young children usually have no symptoms or have a mild illness only. Older children and adults may have fever, a general feeling of being unwell, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal discomfort, followed within a few days by jaundice (yellowness of the skin). These symptoms usually appear 20 to 30 days after being exposed to the virus, but may appear between 10 and 50 days after exposure. Illness may last from one to two weeks to six to nine months.

If you are infected with hepatitis A, you can spread the virus to others from two weeks before you have any symptoms up until seven days after jaundice appears.

Death from hepatitis A infection is rare and is more likely to occur in older patients. Longlasting, recurring illness for up to one year happens in 15% of cases. However, for people with chronic liver disease, infection with hepatitis A can be a serious health risk.

## Who is most at risk for hepatitis A?

- Sexual partners and household members of someone who has hepatitis A
- People exposed to contaminated water or food
- People in areas where hepatitis A is common because clean water or food is not available
- Children and staff of day nurseries where someone is infected with hepatitis A, especially centres where children are in diapers
- Men who have sex with men
- People who share contaminated injection drug equipment

## How is hepatitis A treated?

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. People with hepatitis A should stay home and rest until they feel better which may take from four to six weeks. Alcohol should be avoided. Make sure to see your health care provider for further guidance and information.

## How can I reduce the risk of hepatitis A infection?

Hepatitis A vaccine is available that can protect you against infection. Please contact your healthcare provider for further information on the vaccine. The vaccine is available free of charge to the following high risk groups:

- Persons with chronic liver disease
- Persons engaging in injecting drug use
- Men who have sex with men

Practice good personal hygiene, including hand washing after using the toilet and diapering children and before handling food. The virus may be present in a person's stool for several months after the start of symptoms, even if they are feeling better.

People with hepatitis A should:

- Avoid preparing food for others
- Take precautions when in places where hygiene and sanitation may be inadequate
- Make sure fresh fruits and vegetables have been washed with clean water or peel them
- When eating cooked foods, make sure they are still hot when they are served
- Avoid drinks or ice that may have been prepared with untreated water
- Wash hands before eating or drinking. If running water is not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol based hand sanitizer is effective
- Food handlers, health care workers and/or children confirmed to be infected with hepatitis A virus, should not return to work, school or child care centre until:
  - Two weeks after symptoms have appeared, or
  - Seven days after jaundice appears, or
  - As directed by a health care provider

