

# Hepatitis A Fact Sheet

## **Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV)**

People who get hepatitis A may feel sick for a few weeks to several months, but usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage. Anyone who has not had hepatitis A before or has not been vaccinated against hepatitis A can become infected, but certain groups are at higher risk, including:

- International travelers
- Men who have sex with men
- People who use or inject drugs
- People experiencing homelessness

Hepatitis A was once the most commonly reported vaccine-preventable disease in the United States. Since the introduction of the HAV vaccine, cases have significantly declined.

## **Hepatitis A is spread from person to person**

Hepatitis A is very contagious. HAV is found in the stool and blood of people who are infected. The virus is usually spread when particles of stool containing HAV get on objects or surfaces. These particles are often too small to be seen. Others can get those particles on their hands and then touch their mouths and ingest (swallow) the virus.

Hepatitis A can also be spread by sexual contact or consuming food or drinks contaminated with HAV.

People with hepatitis A are usually contagious starting about a week before they even start feeling sick. They usually remain contagious until about two weeks after their symptoms begin; however, HAV can survive in the environment for months.

## **Symptoms of hepatitis A include:**

- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Brown, tea-colored urine
- Diarrhea or light-colored stool
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Stomach pain
- Nausea
- Tiredness

Most people will start to feel sick about a month after they were exposed to HAV, but symptoms can appear anywhere from 2 to 7 weeks after exposure, and some people won't develop any symptoms at all.

## **Talk to your healthcare provider if you think you have hepatitis A**

HAV infection is typically diagnosed by a blood test. There is no specific treatment for HAV. Doctors often recommend rest, a well-balanced diet, and fluids. People who are very sick may need to receive care in a hospital.

## **People who were exposed to someone with hepatitis A might need treatment**

If you were exposed to someone with hepatitis A and have not had the disease before or been vaccinated against it, your doctor might recommend medication that may prevent you from getting sick or lessen the severity of your symptoms if you do become ill. The two medications commonly given are the hepatitis A vaccine and hepatitis A immune globulin. Both medicines are most effective if given soon after the exposure, so talk to your healthcare provider right away if you think you were in contact with someone who has hepatitis A.

## **Hepatitis A can be prevented**

Vaccination is the best way to protect against hepatitis A. There are different vaccines available for hepatitis A. You may need to receive either two or three doses to be fully vaccinated, depending on which vaccine your healthcare provider recommends. Some hepatitis A vaccines also include the hepatitis B vaccine. Talk to your doctor about which vaccine is best for you.

In addition to getting vaccinated, you can help prevent hepatitis A through good hygiene. Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet or changing diapers, before preparing any food or drink, and before eating. Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating.