

Hepatitis A Fact Sheet

Hepatitis A (HAV) is the virus that causes the liver disease Hepatitis A.

HAV is the most frequently reported vaccine-preventable disease in the US, occurring as individual cases or community epidemics. Anyone can get this infection, unless you have had the disease before or have had the vaccine. While there is no chronic (long-term) state, HAV infection is a serious disease varying from a mild short term illness to one of greater severity lasting several months.

Hepatitis A is passed in a person's feces (stool).

The infection is chiefly spread by putting something in the mouth (even though it may look clean) that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with HAV. Consuming contaminated food or water is another way of getting the disease. Raw or undercooked shellfish from contaminated waters can be a source as well.

Symptoms to look for:

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

Symptoms usually appear within 28 days after exposure. The contagious period begins 2 weeks before symptoms and lasts about one week after symptoms appear. About half of the adults who catch hepatitis A get sick, and usually feel ill for about 2 weeks (sometimes longer). Only a few children get sick when they catch hepatitis A. But all people who catch the virus can spread it to others.

See a doctor immediately for treatment.

The only way to know if you have HAV infection is to have a blood test.

Check with your doctor or your local health department for advice.

There is no special treatment for HAV, but doctors usually recommend rest, good diet, fluids, and avoiding alcohol. A few people may need to be hospitalized.

Vaccine and Immune Globulin (IG) are ways to prevent getting hepatitis A.

Vaccination is the best way to protect against hepatitis A. Two doses of the vaccine given 6 months apart are needed for full, long term protection. Persons not previously vaccinated who **have been recently exposed** should be given a single dose of hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG), depending on age and health status. The vaccine is routinely recommended for persons 12 months of age and older:

- All children at age 1 year (i.e. 12-23 months)
- Travel to countries that have high rates of hepatitis A
- Men who have sex with men
- Users of injection and non-injection drugs
- Persons with chronic (lifelong) liver disease, such as hepatitis B & C
- People with clotting factor disorders, such as hemophilia
- Persons who work with HAV in a laboratory setting

Good personal hygiene is another prevention measure.

Wash hands with soap and water:

- After using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Before preparing any food or drink and before eating.