

Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease caused by infection with the Hepatitis A virus (HAV).

How is the Hepatitis A virus transmitted?

The Hepatitis A virus is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with Hepatitis A. This type of transmission is called “fecal-oral.” For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where good personal hygiene is not observed. Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has Hepatitis A. Casual contact, such as in the office, factory, or school setting, does not spread the virus. In the United States, Hepatitis A is less commonly associated with exposure to fecally contaminated food or water. The average incubation period (the time from exposure to the virus to the onset of symptoms) for Hepatitis A is 28 days, with a range of 15-50 days.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

People infected with Hepatitis A may not have any signs or symptoms of the disease. Older persons are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms are present, they usually occur abruptly and may include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine,

clay-colored bowel movements, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

Is there a cure for Hepatitis A?

While there is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A except supportive care, symptoms usually last less than 2 months; a few persons are ill for as long as 6 months.

How would I find out if I have Hepatitis A?

Talk to your doctor or someone from your local health department if you suspect that you may have Hepatitis A or any type of viral hepatitis. Because the symptoms of Hepatitis A are the same for all types of hepatitis, Hepatitis A diagnosis must be confirmed by blood test.

How can I prevent transmitting Hepatitis A?

The most important way to prevent transmitting Hepatitis A (and many other infections) is to always wash your hands after using the bathroom, after changing a diaper, or before preparing or eating any food. A person with Hepatitis A is generally infectious for up to two weeks prior to symptom onset and for one week afterward.

Is there a vaccine for Hepatitis A?

The Hepatitis A vaccine has been licensed in the U.S. for use in people 1 year of age or older. The vaccine is recommended (before exposure to the Hepatitis A virus) for all children at age 1 year, for persons who are more likely to get Hepatitis A virus infection

or who are more likely to get seriously ill if they do get Hepatitis A, and for any person wishing to obtain immunity. For persons who have already been exposed to the Hepatitis A virus, vaccine or immune globulin, a preparation of antibodies, can be given. It must be administered within 2 weeks of exposure to Hepatitis A for maximum protection. Immune globulin can also be given before exposure for short-term protection against Hepatitis A.

Who should be vaccinated against Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A vaccination provides protection before a person is exposed to the virus. It is recommended for the following groups:

- All children at age 1 year (i.e., 12–23 months).
- Children and adolescents ages 2–18 who live in states or communities where routine Hepatitis A vaccination has been implemented because of high disease incidence.
- Persons traveling to or working in countries that have high or intermediate rates of Hepatitis A.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Users of illegal injection and noninjection drugs.
- Persons who have occupational risk for infection.
- Persons who have chronic liver disease.
- Persons who have clotting-factor disorders.
- Household members and other close personal contacts of adopted children newly arriving from countries with high or intermediate Hepatitis A endemicity.

Should all food service and healthcare workers be vaccinated for Hepatitis A prior to working?

No. Although persons who work as food handlers have a critical role in common-

source foodborne outbreaks, they are not at increased risk for Hepatitis A because of their occupation. Health care workers are not at increased risk for Hepatitis A. If a patient with Hepatitis A is admitted to a hospital, routine infection control precautions will prevent transmission to hospital staff. If infection control precautions were not followed, the healthcare worker may be recommended to receive immune globulin or vaccine.

After someone has had Hepatitis A are they immune?

Yes. Someone who has recovered from Hepatitis A cannot get it again.

For specific concerns about Hepatitis A, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov or the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.dhhs.nh.gov.