

What Food Service Workers Need to Know about Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus. People get hepatitis A by eating contaminated food or water, or through close contact with an infected person.

Why should restaurants be concerned about hepatitis A?

A food service worker with hepatitis A can transmit the virus to patrons by contaminating surfaces, utensils, or food. If recognized early, steps can be taken to prevent transmission to others.

How do I know if I have been infected with Hepatitis A?

Some people who are infected have no symptoms while most will have some combination of the following: nausea, fever, stomachache, dark urine, light stools, and jaundice (yellow skin and eyes). Symptoms appear 15 to 50 days after exposure to the virus. The only way to diagnose hepatitis A is by a blood test.

What happens if I become infected with Hepatitis A?

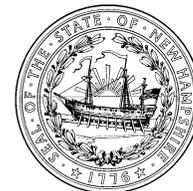
There is no treatment for hepatitis A. If a food service worker becomes infected, state law requires that person cannot work at a food service establishment until one week after the onset of symptoms. The health department will visit the restaurant to ensure appropriate food handling practices and to determine if there is risk to the restaurant patrons. If there is risk, the health department will recommend that other employees and/or patrons receive a protective shot called immune globulin or IG that helps prevent hepatitis A in people who have been exposed to the virus.

How can I prevent Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A transmission can be prevented in food service establishments by following routine food safety practices including:

- Proper and frequent handwashing
 - Wash hands with hot soapy water for at least 20 seconds.
 - Hands must be washed after using the restroom, eating, smoking, coughing, sneezing, and handling garbage or soiled equipment and utensils.
 - Hands must be washed before handling or preparing food.
 - Hand sanitizers do not replace the need for handwashing.
- No bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods including garnishes and rearranging cooked food on a plate.
- Stay home from work if you are experiencing vomiting or diarrhea

If you have been in contact with someone with hepatitis A, be sure to consult with your physician and the health department to determine the need for immune globulin (IG). Hepatitis A can also be prevented by receiving the hepatitis A vaccine. Consult with your physician to determine whether you should receive this vaccine.



For more information, contact:

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