



HEPATITIS A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that infects the liver. Hepatitis A infection can last from a few weeks to several months. It does not lead to chronic infection.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis A is spread primarily by excretion of the virus in bowel movements. It may be acquired from contact with an infected person (often due to poor handwashing after going to the bathroom). Spread can also occur through contaminated water or food.

What are the symptoms?

Many people infected with hepatitis A don't know they have the virus because they don't get sick. Infected people who have no symptoms are still infectious and can spread the virus to others. Those who do get sick, usually become ill with fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and yellow skin and eyes (jaundice). Recovery usually occurs in four to six weeks.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms appear 15 to 50 days (average 28 days) after exposure to the virus.

How long are people infectious?

People are most contagious from about two weeks before to seven days after onset of symptoms.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable disease. Talk to your health care provider about the vaccine.

Families should practice the following good health habits:

- Clean hands well and often and teach children to clean their hands too.
- Do not share eating or drinking utensils.
- Clean surfaces that are frequently touched including toys, door knobs, tables, and counters regularly with soap and water or cleaning wipes.
- Minimize close contact with other people when they are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, put your used tissue in the trash can and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A. Bed rest is recommended while the individual feels too ill to be out of bed. People generally recover from symptoms in four to six weeks.