

Hepatitis A Fact Sheet

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus

The hepatitis A virus causes an infection of the liver. The virus is passed in a person's feces (stool).

Anyone can get hepatitis A if they haven't had it before (unless they have been vaccinated)

People can get it from another child or adult who has hepatitis A, or by eating food contaminated by someone who has the hepatitis A virus. Raw or undercooked shellfish that come from contaminated waters can also be a source. The symptoms start about 4 weeks after infection (with a range of 2 to 6 weeks).

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)

Not everyone gets sick from hepatitis A

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. The virus is in the feces for about 3 weeks (from about 2 weeks before to 1 week after the illness starts).

Handwashing can stop the spread of hepatitis A

Wash hands carefully with soap and water

- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers
- Before touching food
- Before eating

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

Vaccination is the best way to protect against hepatitis A before you get exposed. Get vaccinated if you travel overseas to or live in areas with high rates of hepatitis A, use street drugs, have chronic liver disease or a clotting factor disorder, may be exposed at work, or if you are a man and have sex with other men. Vaccination should protect you for the rest of your life.

If you have been in close contact with someone infected with hepatitis A, a shot called "IG" (immune globulin) can help stop you from getting hepatitis A if given early enough. IG will only protect you from getting hepatitis A for a few months.

See your doctor or call the health department

If you or people in your family have these symptoms, if you have been in close contact with someone who has hepatitis A, or if you want to get hepatitis A vaccine, call your doctor or your Preventive Medicine at **953-8809/8810**.