



# Hepatitis A

**Hepatitis** is a disease in which the liver becomes irritated or damaged. There are many causes of hepatitis, including viruses such as the hepatitis A virus (formerly called infectious hepatitis).

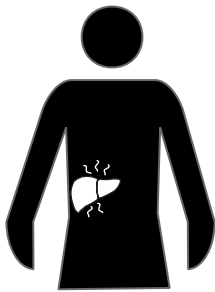
**Hepatitis is a serious disease because it affects a vital organ of the body.**

**Hepatitis A** is a common and contagious form of viral hepatitis. Symptoms of hepatitis A usually begin 2 to 6 weeks after catching the virus. Hepatitis A is diagnosed through a blood test. Once you've had hepatitis A, you will develop immunity to the hepatitis A virus and **should not get this illness again**. But you can still get other forms of hepatitis, such hepatitis B, C, D, and E. Talk to your doctor if you have questions about these types of hepatitis.

## Usual symptoms of hepatitis A

A person with hepatitis A may have **some, all, or none** of the symptoms. The symptoms can be mild or severe and may last from 2 weeks to several months. Children don't usually become as ill as older people.

Symptoms may include:



- tiredness
- loss of appetite
- abdominal pain, especially near the liver (see picture)
- nausea and vomiting
- fever, chills
- muscle/joint aches
- dark urine
- yellow color (jaundice) of the skin or white part of the eyes
- diarrhea or light-colored bowel movements

## How hepatitis A is spread

Hepatitis A virus is spread when the virus in the feces (stool) of an infected person gets into the mouth of a person who is not infected. If an infected person uses the bathroom and does not use good handwashing afterward, the virus can get onto food prepared or served to others. This spread from feces to mouth can also happen when:

- People who **do not** have hepatitis **do not wash their hands** after changing diapers of a child who **does** have hepatitis.
- People who **do not** have hepatitis **do not wash their hands** after taking care of people who **do** have hepatitis.
- People who **do** have hepatitis give child care, health care, or food service to others. People who have hepatitis might not have symptoms and might not know they are contagious at the time.

<u>Common ways to catch viral hepatitis</u>			
Hepatitis	A	B	C
Contaminated food/water	■		
Feces to hands/mouth	■		
Family members	■	■	S
Mother to infant		■	S
SEX - vaginal		■	S
SEX - oral/anal	■	■	
NEEDLES - drug use with shared needles	R	■	■
NEEDLES - medical use, accidental		■	■
NEEDLES - body piercing or tattoo		■	■
Blood products	R	■	■

■ Confirmed transmission  
 S Suspected but not proven  
 R Rarely

Hepatitis A can be spread easily in restaurants, or in the home, daycare or health-care setting.

**The illness is not often spread through normal school or work contact.**

You can also get hepatitis A from drinking or swimming in water that contains the hepatitis A virus. The virus usually gets into the water from sewage. People can also get hepatitis A from eating raw clams, oysters and mussels taken from such water.



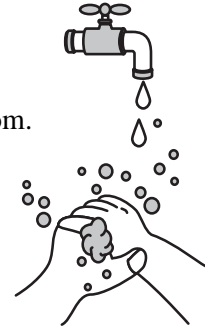
## Ways to avoid hepatitis A

Because you or the people you come in contact with can have hepatitis A and not know it, frequent handwashing with soap and warm water is very important, especially after using the restroom and before eating.

- ✓ Always **wash** your hands before eating or preparing food.
- ✓ Always **wash** your hands with warm water and soap after using the bathroom.
- ✓ Teach your children the importance of good **hand washing**.
- ✓ **Wash** your hands thoroughly after changing diapers.

*Also*

- ✓ Avoid sexual activity that may expose you to feces.
- ✓ Obey "no swimming signs" posted on beaches by health departments to avoid contaminated water.



## Other ways to stop hepatitis A



**Immune Globulin:** A person who is exposed to hepatitis A can get a shot\* of immune globulin. Immune globulin is a disease-fighting part of blood that can prevent hepatitis A. But you must get the shot within two weeks after you've come in contact with hepatitis A. **\*Note: Immune globulin shots are not available at County Health Centers.**

**Vaccination:** A vaccine is now available that can keep people from getting hepatitis A. People who are at high risk for hepatitis A should get the vaccine. Talk to your doctor if you think you are in a high risk group.

**Community Sanitation:** If you live in a rural area and have a septic tank, be sure the tank is installed correctly.

**Travel:** If you are traveling to a country with poor sanitation, get a hepatitis A vaccine before you leave the U.S. Try to get the vaccine at least 6 weeks before your trip so that it has time to take effect. Be careful of what you eat and drink in that country, especially uncooked foods and ice. Cooked foods are safer because heat (185°) kills the virus.

## Treatment for hepatitis A

This illness can last from a few weeks to several months. There is no treatment for hepatitis A, but you should see a doctor who will tell you how to take care of yourself while you are ill.

### **You also need to:**



Get plenty of rest.



Eat healthy foods.



Avoid alcohol and fatty foods because they are hard on the liver.

**Your doctor needs to report hepatitis to  
County Health Services to prevent  
this disease from spreading throughout the community.**

**For more information or to report this illness,  
call (619) 515-6620.**

