

HEPATITIS A

(he-pa-TYE-tis)

What Is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infectious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. Approximately 1000 – 3000 cases of Hepatitis A are reported each year. It is usually a self-limiting illness.

Symptoms & Duration: Symptoms are usually abrupt and include fever, malaise, abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, tiredness, nausea, and vomiting followed in a few days by dark urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Symptoms of infection become more severe as people become older. Young children may not show any outward signs of infection apart from feeling “unwell”. Symptoms usually last less than 2 months but may persist for as long as 6 months.

Incubation Period: Symptoms usually occur within 28-30 days after the virus enters the body, but they can begin within the range of 15–50 days.

Recovery, Long Term Effects & Immunity: Most people recover completely and acquire life long immunity. About 15% of people infected with Hepatitis A may experience relapsing symptoms over a 6-9 month period. Death from Hepatitis A infection is rare.

How Is Hepatitis A Virus Spread?

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. Once infected, a person can pass the virus to others for up to two weeks or more before they even know they are sick. They remain infectious for up to 1 week after they get sick, especially when they have jaundice. Hepatitis A outbreaks have also been attributed to eating shellfish or any food that comes into contact with sewage contaminated water. Hepatitis A can also be spread through anal-oral sexual contact with a person who has Hepatitis A. If you have had close contact with a person with Hepatitis A, a vaccine is available that can help prevent you from getting sick if it is given within 14 days of your contact with the ill person.

How Do You Prevent Hepatitis A Virus Infection?

- **Thorough hand washing is the best prevention.** Wash hands after using the toilet, changing diapers and before handling or eating food.
- Do not eat raw shellfish and avoid eating raw fish.
- If traveling outside Canada, be sure the water you drink is bottled or properly treated. Remember that ice cubes could be contaminated.
- Avoid sex that involves anal contact.
- Consider Hepatitis A immunization if your personal and or professional life puts you at risk for Hepatitis A. Hepatitis A vaccine consists of one dose with a booster, 6-12 months after the first dose. Protection is expected to last ten years after completion of the two doses.
- If traveling to an area where Hepatitis A is common, immunization should be obtained.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT
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