

HEPATITIS A FACT SHEET

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). Hepatitis A is not caused by the same virus as hepatitis B or hepatitis C, although all three of these diseases can cause similar symptoms.

Who can get hepatitis A?

Anyone who has not previously had Hepatitis A or received the vaccine. Once you recover from Hepatitis A, you develop antibodies that protect you from the virus for life. The disease is more common among the following persons:

- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common (such as parts of Africa and Asia)
- Men who have sexual contact with other men
- People who use illegal drugs, whether injected or not
- People with clotting-factor disorders, such as hemophilia
- People who live with someone who has hepatitis A
- People who have oral-anal sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis A

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

The symptoms of hepatitis A may include fatigue, poor appetite, fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, joint pain, jaundice (a yellowing of the skin or eyes), and clay-colored stool. Not everyone who is infected will have symptoms. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children.

How soon do symptoms appear?

If symptoms occur, they usually begin two to six weeks after exposure.

How does hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is usually spread when the HAV enters a person's mouth when they eat, drink or have contact

with objects contaminated by the feces (or stool) of an infected person. This occurs when an infected person does not wash his or her hands properly after going to the bathroom and touches other objects or food. Even a person who does not have symptoms can spread the virus to others up to two weeks before symptoms appear.

Is there a vaccine for hepatitis A?

Yes. This is the best way to prevent the disease. Protection begins approximately two to four weeks after the first injection. Therefore, persons who plan to travel to places where hepatitis A virus is common and the vaccine is recommended should receive the first dose as soon as travel is planned.

How is hepatitis A treated?

There is no specific treatment for the virus. Treatment is supportive and based on a patient's clinical condition. Symptoms usually last less than two months, although some people can be ill for as long as six months. Almost all people who get hepatitis A recover completely and do not have any lasting liver damage.

How can people protect themselves against hepatitis A?

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is through vaccination with the hepatitis A vaccine. You can also protect yourself by washing your hands frequently with soap and water, scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds, after using the bathroom, changing a diaper or before preparing food.

Where can I get more information?

Information about hepatitis A and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or call (202) 442-9371.

