

# Hepatitis A

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## What is it?

- Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver that is caused by a virus.
- The virus is found in the stool of infected people.
- Hepatitis A is very contagious. This means that it is easily spread from person-to-person.
- Symptoms of Hepatitis A include:
  - tiredness
  - fever
  - dark urine
  - diarrhea
  - jaundice – yellowing of the skin and eyes
  - abdominal pain
  - nausea and vomiting
- The average time between getting the virus and the time you show symptoms is about 28 days. You may have these symptoms for about 4 weeks.
- The symptoms are more severe in adults. You may not notice any symptoms in children.

## How is it spread?

- Hepatitis A is spread mainly by stool that has contaminated water and food.
- A very common way it is spread is when eating food prepared by someone with Hepatitis A. This can happen when the person preparing the food does not wash their hands after going to the bathroom or changing a diaper.
- You may also get Hepatitis A by eating or drinking:
  - water or ice contaminated with sewage water
  - raw shellfish contaminated with sewage water
  - fruits, vegetables or other foods eaten uncooked that may have been contaminated while they were growing and during handling.
- Hepatitis A is also spread by oral-anal sexual contact and IV drug use (sharing equipment).

Hepatitis A is a disease that you can get in any country. Areas in the Caribbean, Mexico and southern and eastern Europe are considered higher risk areas due to poor sanitation and hygiene.

## Vaccine

- There is a vaccine for Hepatitis A. It is given in 2 doses (needle) 6 months apart.
- There is also a combined vaccine of Hepatitis A and hepatitis B that is available.

## Is there treatment for it?

- There is no effective treatment to date. Symptoms usually resolve in 4 to 6 weeks. Discuss with your doctor when it is safe to return to school or work.
- You will need to get lots of rest if you have Hepatitis A.
- Drinking lots of fluids and eating good meals will help you get better. If you feel sick to your stomach or do not feel like eating, it might help to eat smaller meals and eat more often.
- Do not drink alcohol when you are ill because it may damage your liver. Avoid any kind of hard work or exercise. Your family doctor can give you specific directions or medical treatment that you need.
- You will get better with Hepatitis A. There is no carrier state. This means once you are well you cannot spread it to others. Once you get it and recover you are protected for life from getting it again.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of it?

Here are some things you can do to prevent getting Hepatitis A:

- avoid unclean water and ice
- clean uncooked fruits and vegetables
- clean your hands well after using the bathroom or changing diapers
- consider getting a needle (vaccination) to prevent Hepatitis A if you have to travel to areas where there is a lot of Hepatitis A

## For more information

Go to the Public Health Agency of Canada website:

[http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hcai-iamss/bbp-pts/hepatitis/hep\\_a-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hcai-iamss/bbp-pts/hepatitis/hep_a-eng.php)

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.  
Clean your hands.**

