



Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A causes the liver to be inflamed or damaged and function can be affected. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infection. Hepatitis A can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is transmitted from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the feces of a person with Hepatitis A. This type of transmission is called "fecal-oral." The virus is more easily spread in areas where poor sanitary conditions exist or where good personal hygiene is not practiced. Common source outbreaks have been related to contaminated water, food contaminated by infected food handlers, raw or undercooked shellfish harvested in contaminated waters, and contaminated produce such as lettuce and strawberries.

Symptoms may begin as early as 15 days or as long as 50 days after exposure. The average time from exposure to symptoms is about 1 month. Most people are contagious for 2 weeks before and for a few days to 1 week after symptoms begin.

How is Hepatitis A treated?

Since there is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A, supportive measures such as rest, change of diet and increased fluid intake are generally recommended. It is important that a person with suspected Hepatitis A infection consult with their physician, who can confirm the diagnosis by obtaining a thorough patient history and performing certain lab tests. A physician can also make recommendations for post-exposure prophylaxis for close contacts of a person diagnosed with Hepatitis A.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

- The best way to prevent Hepatitis A is by getting vaccinated. The vaccine is recommended for all children beginning at one year of age and all others who are at risk of infection. The Hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective and given in a series of 2 shots, 6 months apart. Both doses are needed for long term protection.
- Practice good personal hygiene by washing hands with soap and water prior to food preparation, before eating, after using the bathroom, or after diapering/toileting a small child.
- Close contacts to a Hepatitis A case may receive either the Hepatitis A vaccine or the immune globulin within 2 weeks of exposure to prevent disease.
- Infected food handlers, day care staff or attendees should be excluded from work or attendance until they are no longer infectious to avoid transmitting the virus to others.

Symptoms of Hepatitis A :

- Abdominal pain, especially on the right side of the body where the liver is located
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Dark urine
- Grey colored feces
- Jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin)

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