

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus resulting in the inflammation and injury of the liver.

CAUSES

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool and blood of people who are infected. It can be transmitted in microscopic amounts through contact with infected people, food, and objects.

SYMPTOMS

Not everyone with hepatitis A has symptoms. If symptoms develop, they usually appear within 2-7 weeks of exposure. Symptoms usually last less than 2 months, although some individuals can be ill for as long as 6 months. These include but are not limited to:

- Yellow skin or eyes
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Upset stomach, vomiting, stomach pain
- Dark urine or light-colored stools, diarrhea
- Feeling tired

Anyone who has been exposed or develops symptoms should see a health care provider.

Individuals who have hepatitis A should not handle or prepare food for other people or share utensils.

TRANSMISSION

The hepatitis A virus is spread when someone ingests the virus through:

- Personal contact with someone who has the virus
- Eating contaminated food or drink

Individuals can spread the virus to others up to 2 weeks before symptoms appear. Asymptomatic individuals (those who experience no symptoms) can also spread the virus.

Although anyone can get hepatitis A, certain groups are at higher risk of getting or experiencing severe illness. Individuals at increased risk of experiencing severe illness from hepatitis A include those with chronic liver disease, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

TESTING

A health care provider can diagnosis hepatitis A by ordering a blood test. To treat the symptoms, health care providers usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. Some people with severe symptoms may need medical care in a hospital.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

Hepatitis A vaccines are effective at preventing infection, but our understanding of their safety is limited because clinical trials evaluating their use did not include appropriate placebo groups. Find hepatitis A vaccines by contacting a health care provider, county health department, or pharmacy. Practicing good hand hygiene is also important in preventing the spread of hepatitis A, including thoroughly washing hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers may not kill the virus.