

Hepatitis A

Your questions answered

What is Hepatitis A? Hepatitis A, also known as infectious hepatitis, is a viral disease that affects the liver.

What are its symptoms? Symptoms are usually age dependent. Adults are more likely to have the classic symptoms of fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, diarrhea and jaundice. Someone experiencing jaundice usually has dark brown urine, pale stools (feces) and the whites of the eyes turn yellow. Young children may have mild flu-like symptoms or no symptoms at all and seldom get jaundice. Symptoms normally last one to two weeks but may last longer.

How is it spread? The virus is found in the stools (feces) of infected people. It is spread when people don't wash their hands after using the toilet, changing a diaper or soiled sheets then touch their mouths, prepare food for others or touch others with their contaminated hands. It may also be spread by contaminated food or water. A person is most contagious two weeks before symptoms until one week after.

Who gets Hepatitis A? Anyone can. People who live with or have sex with people who have the disease are at high risk of becoming infected. Hepatitis A sometimes spreads among young children in day care because many are in diapers and cannot wash their own hands and no one knows they have the disease because they have no symptoms.

How is it diagnosed? A blood sample is sent to the laboratory for testing.

How is it treated? There is no treatment for the disease and most people do not need any. Problems such as retaining fluid and blood abnormalities are rare, but they can be treated.

Are there any health regulations for people with Hepatitis A? Yes. Because hepatitis A can easily be spread to other people, doctors are required by law to report cases of hepatitis A to the health department. To protect the public, those with the illness cannot handle food, care for patients and perform work involving the care of young children and the elderly until 14 days after the onset of illness. Coworkers of food handlers may also need to receive Hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin. **(OVER)**

What Can **YOU** Do?

School attendee cases should be excluded from school for one week following onset of illness.

How can you prevent Hepatitis A?

- Vaccination with the full, two-dose series of hepatitis A vaccine is the best way to prevent hepatitis A virus infection. Hepatitis A vaccine has been licensed in the United States for use in persons 12 months of age and older.

Those who should be vaccinated routinely against hepatitis A are:

- All children at age 1 year (i.e., 12–23 months).
 - Children and adolescents ages 2–18 in states or communities where routine hepatitis A vaccination has been implemented.
 - Persons traveling to or working in places where hepatitis A virus is common (e.g., Mexico; Central and South America; African; Caribbean; all Asian countries except Japan; southern and eastern Europe). (See the CDC's International Travel website for up-to-date information at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/>.)
 - Men who have sex with men.
 - Users of illegal injection and non-injection drugs.
 - Persons who have occupational risk for infection.
 - Persons who have chronic liver disease.
 - Persons who have clotting-factor disorders.
- Immune globulin (IG) may be available for short-term protection (approximately three months) against hepatitis A, both pre- and post-exposure. Immune globulin must be administered within two weeks after exposure for maximum protection.

Who should receive IG (if available)?

 - Travelers who are under 12 months of age.
 - Travelers who are allergic to a vaccine component or who elect not to receive vaccine.
 - For optimal protection, travelers planning to depart in <2 weeks who are older adults, immunocompromised, have chronic liver disease or other chronic medical conditions should receive the initial dose of vaccine and simultaneously be administered immune globulin at separate injection site.
 - Those exposed to hepatitis A who are under 12 months or over 40 years of age, immunocompromised persons, persons with chronic liver disease and persons who are allergic to the vaccine or a vaccine component.
 - Prevent hepatitis A with good hygiene – including hand washing after using the bathroom, changing diapers and before preparing or eating food.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have an infection, consult with your health-care provider. This fact sheet is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Health and Safety topic fact sheets.

For more information on hepatitis A, call the **Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department** at **(785) 843-0721**, (on the web at: www.ldhealth.org), call the **Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Office of Surveillance and Epidemiology** (877) 427-7317, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/health/default.htm> or contact your doctor, nurse or local health center.