



HEPATITIS A

What is HEPATITIS A?

Hepatitis A (formerly known as infectious hepatitis) is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis A virus.

Who gets Hepatitis A?

Anyone can get Hepatitis A. Children may have mild infections or no symptoms at all and go unrecognized. Another group of special concern is young adults from 15 to 30 years of age. People in this age group tend to be more socially active; participating in activities that may involve sharing food, beverages, or other substances. They are frequently employed in occupations such as food preparation and food service, which could provide the opportunity to expose large numbers of other people.

How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis A spreads from the feces of persons with Hepatitis A. The virus is often carried by minute particles on an infected person's hands. Hepatitis A can be spread by direct contact, or by placing something in the mouth that has been contaminated by a person infected with Hepatitis A. In some cases, consuming contaminated food or water can spread Hepatitis A. Sneezing or coughing can not spread Hepatitis A.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

The symptoms of Hepatitis A may include any or all of the following: fatigue, poor appetite, fever, vomiting, dark urine, and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and/or whites of eyes). Most people recover in a few weeks without any complications. Infants and young children tend to have no symptoms or very mild symptoms and are less likely to develop jaundice than are older children and adults.

How soon do symptoms appear and how is it diagnosed?

Symptoms appear two to six weeks after exposure, but generally within four weeks. Since there are several types of viral Hepatitis, a blood test is needed to confirm which type of Hepatitis is present.

How long is an infected person able to spread the virus?

The contagious period begins about 14 days before the symptoms appear and ends about seven days after jaundice appears. Infected persons with or without symptoms can spread the disease to others.

What is the treatment for Hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A infection. Generally, rest, fluids, and good nutrition are all that is needed. Drugs and alcohol should be avoided.

How can the spread of Hepatitis A be prevented?

The best way to prevent spreading Hepatitis A is careful hand washing after using the toilet or changing diapers. Infected people should not prepare or handle food for others during the contagious period. Avoid eating raw shellfish taken from potentially contaminated waters. Household members, sex partners, drug partners or others in close contact with an infected person should consult with their healthcare provider to determine if they should receive the Hepatitis A vaccine or an injection of immune globulin (IG) to reduce their chance of becoming ill. These must be given within 14 days of exposure to be effective. For long-term protection, Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended.