



## HEPATITIS E

### What is hepatitis E?

Hepatitis E is a viral infection caused by the hepatitis E virus (HEV). Individuals infected with hepatitis E may experience symptoms such as fatigue, jaundice, and abdominal pain, typically lasting from a few weeks to several months. Most people recover completely without lasting liver damage. However, in rare cases, particularly among pregnant women and those with pre-existing liver conditions, hepatitis E can lead to severe complications, including liver failure.

### Who gets hepatitis E?

Travelers to areas of the world with poor sanitation are at greatest risk for contracting hepatitis E. Certain populations are at risk for more severe outcomes due to hepatitis E (HEV), such as long-term liver problems and liver failure, including:

- Pregnant people.
- People who have had solid organ transplants.
- People with compromised immune systems

In addition, in the United States and other countries where hepatitis E is not common, people have gotten sick with hepatitis E after eating raw or undercooked pork, venison (deer), wild boar meat, or shellfish.

### How is hepatitis E spread?

Primarily, HEV infections occur due to fecal-oral transmission, where the virus found in the stool of infected individuals is unknowingly ingested by someone, typically through contaminated water.

However, sporadic cases can arise from foodborne infections after consuming uncooked or undercooked meats such as pork, venison, wild boar, and shellfish. Additionally, in rare instances, blood transfusions in endemic countries can lead to HEV infections.

### What are the symptoms of hepatitis E?

Many individuals, particularly young children, may remain asymptomatic. For those who do experience symptoms, they may include dark urine or clay-colored stools, fatigue, fever, joint pain, loss of appetite, nausea, stomach pain, vomiting, and jaundice, characterized by yellowing of the skin and eyes.

Symptoms of hepatitis E typically last less than two months, though they can persist for up to six months in some cases.

**Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology**  
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## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Not everyone with hepatitis E has symptoms but if symptoms develop, they appear 15-64 days with the average being 26-42 days after the exposure.

## **What is the treatment for hepatitis E?**

Hepatitis E typically resolves without the need for treatment, as there is no specific antiviral therapy available for acute cases. Doctors generally recommend supportive care, advising patients to rest, maintain proper nutrition and hydration, avoid alcohol, and consult their physician before taking any medications that could harm the liver, particularly acetaminophen.

## **What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of hepatitis E?**

Preventing HEV largely depends on maintaining good sanitation practices and ensuring access to clean drinking water. Travelers to developing countries can lower their risk of infection by avoiding unpurified water and refraining from consuming raw pork and venison. It's important to note that there is currently no FDA-approved vaccine available for this virus.

Practicing good hand hygiene — including thoroughly washing hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food — plays an important role in preventing the spread of HEV.

## **Resources**

Hepatitis E Basics. (2024, May 14). Hepatitis E. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis-e/about/index.html>

Heymann, D.L. (2014) Control of Communicable Disease Manual. 20th Edition, American Public Health Association, Washington DC.