



## Hepatitis A Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is Hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. Most people completely recover from hepatitis A.

### **What causes Hepatitis A?**

Individuals can be infected with Hepatitis A by eating food or water contaminated with the stool (feces) of an infected person, which can happen due to poor handwashing. Shellfish, such as oysters and mussels, from contaminated water may also carry the hepatitis A virus.

### **What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?**

Young children usually have no symptoms or have a mild illness only.

Older children and adults may have fever, a general feeling of being unwell, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal discomfort, followed within a few days by jaundice (yellowness of the skin). These symptoms usually appear 20 to 30 days after being exposed to the virus, but may appear between 10 and 50 days later. Illness may last from 1 - 2 weeks to 6 - 9 months. If you are infected with Hepatitis A, you can spread the virus to others from 2 weeks before you have any symptoms up until 7 days after jaundice appears.

Death from hepatitis A infection is rare and is more likely to occur in older patients. Long-lasting illness for up to 1 year happens in 15% of cases. For people with chronic liver disease, infection with hepatitis A can be a serious health risk.

### **Who is at risk?**

- People who live in the same house as someone who has Hepatitis A
- People exposed to contaminated water or food.
- People in areas where hepatitis A is common because clean water or food is not available.
- Children and staff of day nurseries where someone is infected with hepatitis A, especially centres where children are in diapers.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People who share contaminated injection drug equipment.

### **What is the treatment for Hepatitis A?**

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. People with hepatitis A should stay home and rest until they feel better which may take from 4-6 weeks. Alcohol should be avoided.



### **How can I reduce the risk of Hepatitis A infection?**

- Hepatitis A vaccine is available.
- Practice good personal hygiene, including hand washing after using the toilet and diapering children and before handling food. The virus may be present in a person's stool for several months after the start of symptoms, even if they are feeling better.
- People with hepatitis A should avoid preparing food for others.
- Take precautions when in places where hygiene and sanitation may be inadequate.
  - a) Make sure fresh fruits and vegetables have been washed with clean water or peel them.
  - b) When eating cooked foods, make sure they are still hot when they are served
  - c) Avoid drinks or ice that may have been prepared with untreated water.
  - d) Wash hands before eating or drinking. If running water is not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol based hand sanitizer is effective.

### **Who should not receive the hepatitis A vaccine?**

People who have ever had a serious allergic reaction to the hepatitis A vaccine or who are known to be allergic to any part of the hepatitis A vaccine should not receive the vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies. Also, the vaccine is not licensed for use in infants under age 1 year.

### **What are local reactions that might occur after the administration of hepatitis A vaccine?**

Serious adverse reactions are uncommon. Some people report soreness at the injection site and/or headache.

### **I am not sure if I have previously had the hepatitis A vaccine, do I need to get it again?**

If you have been previously vaccinated, you do not need the hepatitis A vaccine. But, if you do not know if you've had the vaccine, receiving it again will not increase risk or side effects of the vaccine.

### **Is there anything special I need to know?**

Food handlers, health care workers and/or children confirmed to be infected with hepatitis A virus, should not return to work, school or child care centre until:

- 2 weeks after symptoms have appeared, or
- 7 days after jaundice appears, or
- as directed by a health care provider