



Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

"Hepatitis" means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis A virus.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis A is usually spread when a person ingests fecal matter (poop) -even in small amounts- from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the stool of an infected person.

Hepatitis A can be spread when:

- An infected person does not wash his/her hands properly after going to the bathroom and then touches objects or food
- A caregiver does not properly wash his or her hands after changing diapers or cleaning up the stool of an infected person
- Someone engages in sexual activities with an infected person.

Hepatitis A also can be spread through contaminated food or water. This most often occurs in countries where Hepatitis A is common.

What is the incubation period?

If symptoms occur, they usually appear from 2 to 6 weeks after exposure. Symptoms can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months, but does not become chronic (long-term).

What are the signs and symptoms?

Some people with Hepatitis A do not have any symptoms. If you do have symptoms, they may include the following: fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain, and, jaundice (yellow color in the skin or the eyes). Almost all

people who get Hepatitis A recover completely and do not have any lasting liver damage.

Should a person with Hepatitis A be isolated?

Exclude from work/school until 7 days after onset of jaundice (or 7 days after symptom onset if no jaundice).

Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing food can help prevent the spread of Hepatitis A.

What type of treatment and care should be given?

There are no special treatments for Hepatitis A. Rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids are recommended. People with Hepatitis A should check with a health professional before taking any prescription pills, supplements, or over-the-counter medications, which can potentially damage the liver. Alcohol should be avoided.

Is there a vaccination against this disease?

Vaccination with the Hepatitis A vaccine is the best method of prevention. Vaccination is recommended for travelers to certain countries, and for people at high risk for infection with the virus.

If you or your child requires vaccination against Hepatitis A, contact your physician or visit the Child Health Immunization Clinic located at the Hamilton Health Centre, 67 Victoria Street, Hamilton, to be immunized as soon as possible.

Adapted from: "Viral Hepatitis." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009 (<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/>, accessed 6 May 2014)