

HEPATITIS A FACT SHEET

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by a virus which is found in the stool (bowel movement) of an infected person. People with hepatitis A can be very sick and usually need to see a doctor in order to get better. There is no treatment for hepatitis A.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is spread from person to person by hands that have not been washed after going to the bathroom or by touching items such as diapers or linens soiled by bowel movement. It is also spread by water or ice and by eating uncooked foods that may have become contaminated during handling. Hepatitis A can also be spread through common household items such as unclean eating utensils and cups, cigarettes, lip balm and other items used to take drugs.

What are symptoms of hepatitis A?

Symptoms of hepatitis A can include the following:

- Tiredness
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Dark urine
- Loss of appetite
- Yellowing of the skin and eyeballs (jaundice)
- Nausea

Persons with acute hepatitis A are most infectious from two weeks before onset of symptoms to one week after onset. Infants and preschool children may have no symptoms of hepatitis A infection, but still can pass the virus on to others.

Who is at risk for hepatitis A?

- People who live with a person with hepatitis A
- People who have sex with a person with hepatitis A
- Children and staff of child care centers where a child or employee has hepatitis A
- Residents and staff of centers for disabled children when a child or employee has hepatitis A
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common and where there is little clean water or proper sewage disposal

- People who use or share cigarettes, eating utensils or cups, lip balm, or other items used to take drugs

Is there a cure for hepatitis A?

No. There is no medicine for hepatitis A once you have it. Vaccine or immune globulin can be taken within two weeks after exposure to prevent or lessen symptoms.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

- Always wash your hands after using the bathroom
- Always wash your hands after cleaning the toilet
- Always wash your hands after changing diapers
- Always wash your hands after handling soiled towels or linens
- Always wash your hands before fixing food or eating
- If exposed to hepatitis A, ask your doctor about vaccine or immune globulin
- If traveling to areas where hepatitis A is common:
 - Get immune globulin or vaccination before travel;
 - Drink bottled beverages; and
 - Do not eat uncooked fruits or vegetables, unless you peel them yourself

When should my child be immunized?

If your child has received the complete hepatitis A vaccine series (2 doses) they **DO NOT** need to be revaccinated. If your child has only received 1 dose of Hepatitis A vaccine they can receive their 2nd dose now or if they have never been vaccinated now is the time.

What should I do if my child has symptoms?

If your child has symptoms of Hepatitis A you should contact their primary care physician, take them to an urgent care or the emergency room. Be sure to tell your physician that your child may have been exposed to Hepatitis A and ask for Hepatitis A IgM blood testing.

Where can I receive additional information?

- Cabell-Huntington Health Department Hepatitis A hotline @ 304-526-3397
- On the web at www.cabellhealth.org
- CDC.gov