Hepatitis A is a disease of the liver caused by hepatitis A virus. It may make you sick for a few weeks to a few months. Most recover with no lasting liver damage.

# Hepatitis A

# How is it spread?

Hepatitis A is spread by coming in contact with the hepatitis A virus. This includes:

- Contact with any person infected with the hepatitis A virus.
- Sexual contact with an infected person.
- Touching contaminated surfaces and then placing your hands near or in your mouth.
- Sharing eating utensils that have virus on them.

Infected people can spread the virus to others a few weeks before they begin to feel bad.

- Eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by <u>feces</u> that contain the virus. The food and drinks most likely to be contaminated are:
  - Fruits.
  - Vegetables.
  - Shellfish.
  - Ice.
  - Water.

In the United States, chlorine in the water kills hepatitis A virus. But infected food workers can still spread hepatitis A directly to food. This occurs when hands are not washed or cleaned before food is handled.

#### Who is at risk of hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A if they have not been vaccinated. In the U.S., you are at a higher risk if you:

- Use illegal drugs, whether injected or not.
- Live with someone who has hepatitis A.
- Have bleeding problems and take clotting factors.
- Have oral-anal sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis A.
- Travel to areas that have high rates of hepatitis A.

Travel to Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, or Central and South America, including Mexico, increases the risk of getting hepatitis A.

#### What are signs of hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A does not always cause people to feel bad. It may make you sick for a few weeks to a few months. Older people can get sicker when they have hepatitis A. Young children with hepatitis A usually do not show any signs. Signs of hepatitis A include:

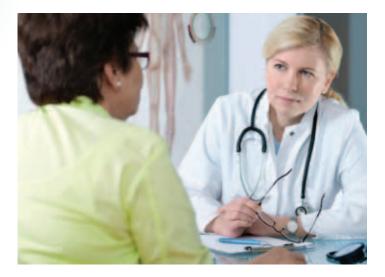
- Yellow skin or eyes (jaundice).
- Tiredness.
- Fever.
- Nausea.
- Vomiting.
- Loss of appetite.
- Stomach pain.
- Light stools.
- Dark urine.
- Diarrhea.

# How do you know if you have hepatitis **A**?

The only way to know if you have hepatitis A is by a medical exam. Your health care provider can examine and test you for hepatitis A.

#### How is it treated?

There are no medicines for treating hepatitis A. If you have been exposed to hepatitis A virus, tell your health care provider. They may be able to give you a protein that fights hepatitis A virus to help keep you from getting sick. Most people with hepatitis A recover without treatment in a few months. A few people will need to be hospitalized for hepatitis A.



# What can happen if you have hepatitis A for a long time?

People with hepatitis A usually improve without treatment and have no lasting liver damage. Symptoms usually last less than 2 months. A few people can be ill for as long as 6 months. Hepatitis A can sometimes cause liver failure and death. This is usually occurs in:

- People 50 years of age or older.
- People with other liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or C.

# If you have hepatitis A:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid drinking <u>any</u> alcohol.
- Check with your health care provider before taking:
  - Medicines.
  - Supplements and herbal medicines.
  - Over-the-counter drugs.
- Clean hands often, especially after using the bathroom.



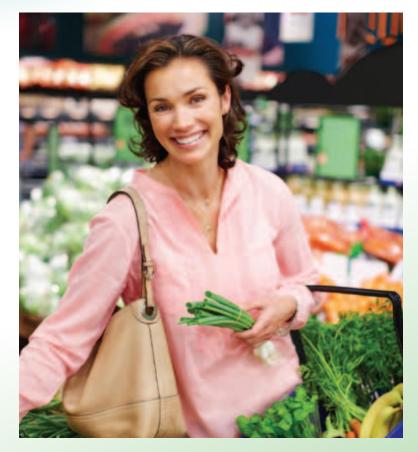
For more on how to clean hands, see *Clean Hands* on page 119.

- Avoid preparing food, if possible, while you are sick.
  - Talk to those listed below about having hepatitis A

so they can get more information to protect themselves:

- Household contacts.
- Sexual contacts.
- Playmates/attendees at childcare centers.
- Persons sharing illegal drugs.
- Persons sharing food or drink.
- Coworkers and/or restaurant patrons where there is an infected food worker.

If you have hepatitis A, avoid drinking alcohol.



### How can you avoid hepatitis A?

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is to be

**vaccinated.** People with certain risk factors and health problems need this vaccine. Ask your doctor if the vaccine is right for you. You <u>cannot</u> get hepatitis A from the vaccine. Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for:

- All children at age 1 year.
- People who use injection and non-injection illegal drugs.
- People with chronic (lifelong) liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- People with bleeding problems who take clotting factors.
- People whose work has a risk for hepatitis A infection.
- People who live in areas with high rates of hepatitis A infection.
- Travelers to countries that have high rates of hepatitis A. These include:
  - Africa.
  - Asia.
  - Latin America.
  - South America.
  - Eastern Europe.

CDC's Travelers' Health site has information about hepatitis A and other vaccines at: **wwwnc.cdc.gov/ travel/yellowbook/2012/chapter-3-infectiousdiseases-related-to-travel/hepatitis-a.htm**  Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent hepatitis A.

#### Other ways to avoid hepatitis A:

- Boil water or drink bottled water in places where the water may not be clean.
- Eat cooked foods and fruits that you can peel. Avoid eating uncooked vegetables or fruits that could have been washed with dirty water, such as lettuce.
- Avoid eating raw or steamed shellfish such as oysters. Shellfish may live in dirty water.
- Use condoms correctly and every time you have sex.
- Clean hands often.





#### What about pregnancy?

Hepatitis A vaccine does not contain live virus, so the risk to the baby is expected to be low. However, the safety of hepatitis A vaccination during pregnancy is not known. The risk of the vaccination should be weighed against the risk for hepatitis A in pregnant women. Ask your health care provider if the vaccine is right for you.

# For more on hepatitis A see:

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

Hepatitis A Basics www.hepatitis.va.gov/patient/basics/hepatitisA-index.asp

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Hepatitis A Information for the Public www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/A/

Guidelines for Vaccinating Pregnant Women; Hepatitis A www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/preg-guide.htm#hepa

#### National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID/NIH):

Hepatitis A www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hepatitis/hepatitisa/Pages/Default.aspx

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health: Viral hepatitis fact sheet www.womenshealth.gov/faq/viral-hepatitis.cfm