

Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes an illness that affects the liver.

How do I get hepatitis A?

You must ingest (swallow or eat) the hepatitis A virus to become infected. Hepatitis A is usually spread through the following:

- People who are infected with hepatitis A will have the virus in their feces (stools). If people do not properly wash their hands after using the restroom or changing diapers, and then handle food or objects that others will put in their mouths (e.g., toys), they can spread the virus to other people.
- An infected person can spread the virus as early as two weeks before symptoms appear and as late as one week after they begin to have jaundice (yellowing of skin or eyes).
- You can get hepatitis A from eating raw shellfish such as oysters or clams.
- Hepatitis A is **NOT** spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, sharing drinks, hugging or kissing.

Symptoms

Symptoms begin 2-6 weeks (usually 28 days) after ingesting the hepatitis A virus. Adults tend to have more symptoms than children. Children under the age of four may not have any symptoms. Symptoms include:

- Fever and feeling tired
- Poor appetite and nausea – sometimes with vomiting
- Brownish or tea-colored urine, gray or light-colored feces (stools)
- Diarrhea
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes)

Prevention

- Hepatitis A vaccine can provide protection against the illness.
- Always wash your hands after using the restroom. You can have and spread the virus even if you do not have any symptoms.
- Wash your hands and the child's hands after diapering or helping with toilet training.
- Wash your hands before touching food or toys children put in their mouths.



Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.

(continued on back)

Hepatitis A (continued)

Treatment for hepatitis A

Immune globulin can be given within two weeks of ingesting the virus to help prevent symptoms or make the illness less severe. If you think you have been exposed to the hepatitis A virus, contact your health care provider or local health department to help you decide if you need immune globulin.

If you think you have hepatitis A:

- See your health care provider.
- Do not prepare food for others
- If your job involves handling food or caring for small children, do not go to work and contact your health care provider.
- Children who might have hepatitis A should not go to child care settings – especially if they are jaundiced or have diarrhea.

**ATTENTION: CHILD CARE CENTERS (children and employees),
RETAIL FOOD ESTABLISHMENT EMPLOYEES, AND
MEDICAL PERSONNEL**

If you think you have ingested the hepatitis A virus – call your health care provider or local health department to help you decide if you need immune globulin. They can tell you when it is safe to return to work. Consider vaccinating yourself against hepatitis A.