

Facts & DETAILS

Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease caused by the Hepatitis A virus (HAV).

How common is hepatitis A?

In 2018, 12,474 hepatitis A cases were reported in the United States. Hepatitis A rates in the U.S. have declined by more than 95% since hepatitis A vaccine became available in 1995. However, since 2016, person-to-person outbreaks of hepatitis A have been occurring across the U.S., mainly among people who use injection drugs or are experiencing homelessness.

How do people become infected?

HAV is found in the stool (poop) or blood of infected people. HAV is usually spread through close personal contact with an infected person or through eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis A?

Signs and symptoms of hepatitis A include jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes), dark urine, diarrhea, clay-colored stool, stomach pain, nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite, fever, tiredness (fatigue), and joint pain. Symptoms usually last less than two months.

Infections range from having no symptoms (common in young children) to disabling illness that may last several months. Some people require hospitalization. In rare cases, death may occur.

After exposure, symptoms typically appear in about 28 days (range 15-50 days).

How long can you spread HAV?

Someone infected with HAV is most contagious from 1 to 2 weeks before symptoms start to about 1 week afterwards.

Who is at risk for hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A, but people at increased risk for infection include the following:

- People with direct contact with someone who has hepatitis A
- People who use or inject drugs
- People experiencing homelessness
- Men who have sex with men
- International travelers
- People with occupational risk for exposure

People at increased risk for severe disease from hepatitis A infection include the following:

- People with chronic liver disease, including people infected with hepatitis B and hepatitis C
- People with HIV

How is hepatitis A treated?

Hepatitis A usually goes away on its own. Currently, there is no specific treatment for hepatitis A, only supportive care.

How can you prevent hepatitis A?

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is to be vaccinated with the full, two-dose series of hepatitis A vaccine. Another important way is to prevent infection is washing your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before preparing and eating food.

Make sure your shots are up to date. Hepatitis A vaccine can be obtained from a medical provider, local clinic, or at the Sedgwick County Health Department, 2716 West Central Avenue, Wichita, Kansas. Call 316-660-7300 to schedule an appointment.

For More Information:
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