

HEPATITIS A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease. Hepatitis (HEP-ah-TY-tis) makes your liver swell and stops it from working right.

You need a healthy liver. The liver does many things to keep you alive. The liver fights infections and stops bleeding. It removes drugs and other poisons from your blood. The liver also stores energy for when you need it.

What causes hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus. A virus is a germ that causes sickness. (For example, the flu is caused by a virus.) People can pass viruses to each other. The virus that causes hepatitis A is called the hepatitis A virus.

How could I get hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is spread by close personal contact with someone else who has the infection. You could also get hepatitis A by:

- eating food that has been prepared by someone with hepatitis A
- drinking water that has been contaminated by hepatitis A (in parts of the world with poor hygiene and sanitary conditions)

Wash your hands before fixing or eating food.

Who can get hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A. But some people are more likely to than others:

- children who go to day care
- people who work in a day care center
- men who have sex with men
- people who travel to other countries where hepatitis A is common

What are the symptoms?

Hepatitis A can make you feel like you have the flu.

You might:

- ❑ feel tired
- ❑ feel sick to your stomach
- ❑ have a fever
- ❑ not want to eat
- ❑ have stomach pain
- ❑ have diarrhea
- ❑ Some people have dark yellow urine
- ❑ light-colored stools
- ❑ yellowish eyes and skin

Some people don't have any symptoms.

If you have symptoms or think you might have hepatitis A, go to a doctor. The doctor will test your blood.

How is hepatitis A treated?

Most people who have hepatitis A get well on their own after a few weeks. You may need to rest in bed for several days or weeks, and you won't be able to drink alcohol until you are well. The doctor may give you medicine for your symptoms.

How can I protect myself?

You can get the hepatitis A vaccine. Vaccines protect you from getting hepatitis A. A vaccine is a drug that you take when you are healthy that keeps you from getting sick. Vaccines teach your body to attack certain viruses, like the hepatitis A virus.

The hepatitis A vaccine is given through a shot. Children can get the vaccine after they turn 2 years old. Children aged 2 to 18 will need three shots. The shots are spread out over a year. Adults get two or three shots over 6 to 12 months.

You need all of the shots to be protected. If you are traveling to other countries, make sure you get all the shots before you go. If you miss a shot, call your doctor or clinic right away to set up a new appointment.

You can protect yourself and others from hepatitis A in these ways, too:

- ❑ Always wash your hands after using the toilet and before fixing food or eating.
- ❑ Wear gloves if you have to touch other people's stool. Wash your hands afterwards.
- ❑ Drink bottled water when you are in another country. (And don't use ice cubes or wash fruits and vegetables in tap water.)

Additional Information:

- ❑ American Liver Foundation - <http://www.liverfoundation.org/>
- ❑ Hepatitis Foundation - <http://www.hepfi.org/>

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