

# Hepatitis A



## What is hepatitis A (hep A)?

Hep A is a serious liver infection caused by the hep A virus, found in the stool of an infected person.

## Who gets hep A?

Everyone is susceptible to hep A, the virus that causes a hep A infection, unless they had the illness in the past or have been vaccinated against it. Some people are more susceptible, including those who:

- Travel to or live in countries where hep A is common
- Are living homeless
- Use illegal drugs, whether injected or not
- Have clotting-factor disorders, such as hemophilia
- Direct contact with someone who has hep A
- Men who have sex with men

## How is hep A spread?

Hep A is spread through feces (stool) by close personal contact with a person who is infected with hep A and/or by eating food or drinking water containing hep A. A person who has the infection can easily pass the disease to others in the same household.

## What are the symptoms of hep A infection?

Hep A can cause a wide variety of symptoms ranging from fever, fatigue, and nausea and vomiting to more serious problems, such as yellowing of the eyes or skin (jaundice), severe stomach pains, and diarrhea that may require hospital admission. Some people get a hep A infection and have no symptoms of the disease. Most children younger than age 6 do not have symptoms when they have hep A. When symptoms are present, young children typically do not have jaundice, but most older children and adults with hep A have jaundice.

## How soon after an infection do the symptoms appear?

If symptoms occur, they will begin anywhere from 15-50 days after exposure, commonly around 30 days (four weeks) later. Symptoms usually develop over a period of several days.

## When and for how long is a person able to spread hep A?

A person can transmit the virus to others up to two weeks before symptoms appear and for about one week after the onset of jaundice.

## Does having the infection make a person immune?

Yes, prior infection with hep A makes a person immune to later infection.

## What are the complications associated with hep A infection?

In rare instances, a hep A infection can result in liver failure and death.

## What is the treatment for hep A?

No specific treatment exists for hep A. Your body will clear hep A on its own. Hep A treatment is supportive and mainly focuses on coping with your signs and symptoms.

## Are there vaccines to prevent hep A infection?

There are safe and effective vaccines against hep A. One type is given as two shots, six months apart. The vaccine also comes in a combination form, containing both hep A and B vaccine, that can be given to persons 18 years of age and older. This vaccine is given as three shots, over a period of six months.

## Are the hep A vaccines effective?

Yes, the hep A vaccines are highly effective in preventing hep A infection. Protection begins approximately two to four weeks after the first injection. The second dose results in long-term protection.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of the infection?

The best way to avoid infection with hep A is by vaccination with the hep A vaccine.

Hep A vaccine can be used to prevent infection, preferably within two weeks of last exposure to the hep A, in those 1-40 years old. Due to the risk of severe infection, those less than 1 year or over 40 years of age are preferably protected from a known exposure through an injection of Immune Globulin (IG), but vaccine can also be used if IG is not available. If IG is used, protection is immediate but lasts only about three months, so vaccination is often given along with IG.

## For more information:

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