

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.

- ◆ Eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by feces 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.

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

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 any 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 cannot 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-infectious-diseases-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