



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 contact with the hepatitis A virus. This includes:

- ▶ Contact with any person infected with the hepatitis A virus.
- ▶ Oral-anal sexual contact with an infected person.
- ▶ Touching contaminated surfaces and then placing your hands near or in your mouth.
- ▶ Sharing forks, spoons, knives, and other utensils that have virus on them.



Those with hepatitis A can spread it to others a few weeks before they begin to feel bad.

- ▶ Eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by feces that contain the virus. These can include:

- Fruits.
- Vegetables.
- Shellfish.
- Ice.
- Water.

In the United States, chlorine in water kills hepatitis A virus. But infected food workers can still spread it directly to food. This occurs when hands are not washed or cleaned and food is handled.

Who is at risk of hepatitis A?

In the U.S., you are at a higher risk if you:

- ▶ Have not been vaccinated for hepatitis A.
- ▶ Use illegal drugs, whether injected or not.
- ▶ Live with someone who has hepatitis A.
- ▶ Have bleeding problems and take certain medicines for blood clotting.
- ▶ 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 you to feel bad. It may make you sick for a few weeks to a few months. Older people can get sicker when they have it. Young children usually do not show any signs. Signs include:

- ▶ Yellow skin or eyes (jaundice).
- ▶ Tiredness.
- ▶ Fever.
- ▶ Nausea.
- ▶ Vomiting.
- ▶ Loss of appetite.
- ▶ Stomach pain.
- ▶ Light stools.
- ▶ Dark urine.
- ▶ Diarrhea.

Symptoms can show 2 to 6 weeks after contact with the virus.



How do you know if you have hepatitis A?

The only way to know if you have it is by seeing a health care provider (HCP). S/he may take a sample of your blood to test.

How is it treated?

There are no medicines for treating hepatitis A. If you have been recently exposed to the virus, tell your HCP. Most people recover by resting and drinking plenty of fluids. A few people will need to be hospitalized.

What can happen if you have hepatitis A for a long time?

Most people improve without treatment and have no lasting liver damage. Signs usually last less than 2 months. Some can be ill for as long as 6 months. The virus can cause liver failure and death mostly 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 HCP before taking:
 - Medicines.
 - Supplements.
 - Over-the-counter drugs.
- ▶ Clean hands often, especially after using the bathroom.
- ▶ Avoid preparing food, while you are sick.
- ▶ Talk to those below so they can learn more 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. The vaccine is for:

- ▶ All children at age 1 year.
- ▶ Those who use injection and non-injection illegal drugs.
- ▶ Those with chronic (lifelong) liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- ▶ Those who take medicines for blood clotting.
- ▶ People whose work has a risk such as:
 - Sanitation workers.
 - Plumbers.
- ▶ Those 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.

Learn more at the CDC's Travelers' Health site wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2012/chapter-3-infectious-diseases-related-to-travel/hepatitis-a.htm.

Other ways to avoid hepatitis A, especially if you have not been vaccinated:

- ▶ Consider boiling water or drinking bottled water if you live in a place with untreated water.
- ▶ 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.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent hepatitis A.

Learn more:

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

Hepatitis A Basics

<https://www.hepatitis.va.gov/patient/hav/index.asp>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Hepatitis A Information for the Public

www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/A/

National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID/NIH):

Hepatitis A

www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hepatitis/hepatitisa/Pages/Default.aspx