

Hepatitis A Fact Sheet

1. **What is hepatitis disease?** – Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital glandular organ located in the upper right part of the abdomen which filters toxins from the blood. When the liver is inflamed this function can be affected. Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus infection. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. Heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions can also cause hepatitis.
2. **What is hepatitis A?** - Hepatitis A disease is caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV).
3. **How is HAV transmitted?** - HAV is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the HAV infected stool of a person with hepatitis A disease. For this reason, HAV is more easily spread through food and water in locations where there are poor sanitary conditions or where standard hand washing practices are not observed. Most infections result from close contact with a HAV infected household member, especially young children who may show little clinical evidence of infection. Casual contact, as in the usual office, factory, or school setting, usually does not spread the virus.
4. **What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis A?** - Persons with hepatitis A may not have any signs or symptoms of the disease. Older persons are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms are present, they occur abruptly and may include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Symptoms usually last less than 2 months; a few persons remain ill for as long as six months. The average time between exposure to the HAV and onset of symptoms (incubation period) is 28 days. Fatal disease is rare.
5. **If I've had hepatitis A in the past, can I get it again?** - No. Once you recover from hepatitis A infection you will never get it again and you cannot transmit the virus to others.
6. **How do I know if I have hepatitis A?** - A blood test to detect antibodies specific for Hepatitis A virus (IgM anti-HAV) is needed to diagnose hepatitis A disease. Talk to your doctor if you suspect that you have been exposed to HAV. This is especially important for persons working as food handlers, in child care centers, or in health care settings.
7. **How can you best prevent hepatitis A?** - Always wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing or eating food. Prior to or after exposure has occurred two commercial products are used to prevent hepatitis A disease:
 - a. Hepatitis A immune globulin is a preparation of harvested serum antibodies that can be given either before exposure to provide short-term protection against hepatitis A infection in persons who have recently been exposed to HAV. Immune globulin must be given within two weeks after exposure to hepatitis A virus for maximum protection.

- b. The hepatitis A vaccine is a shot of inactivated (killed) HAV that stimulates the body's natural immune system to develop long lasting antibodies against the virus.
8. **Who should get vaccinated against hepatitis A?** – Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for the following groups:
 - a. All children at age one year ,
 - b. Travelers to countries that have high rates of hepatitis A disease,
 - c. Men who have sexual contact with other men,
 - d. Users of injection and non-injection illegal drugs,
 - e. People with other chronic (lifelong) liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C,
 - f. People who are treated with clotting-factor concentrates, and
 - g. People who work in a hepatitis A research laboratory
9. **How do you destroy HAV?** - HAV can live outside the body for months, depending on the environmental conditions. It is killed by heating to 185 degrees F. (85 degrees C.) for one minute. However, HAV can still be spread by cooked food if it gets re-contaminated after cooking. Adequate chlorination destroys any HAV that may get into the water supply.
10. **Can I donate blood if I have had any type of viral hepatitis?** - If you had hepatitis A when you were 11 years of age or older, you cannot donate blood. If you had hepatitis A before age 11, you may be able donate blood. Check with your blood donation center.
11. **Can I get infected from my pet?** - No. HAV cannot be transmitted between animals and humans. Humans are the only natural hosts of HAV.
12. **For more information about hepatitis A:** <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HAV/index.htm>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician for specific clinical information.