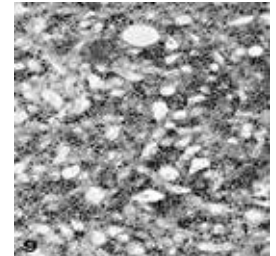


# HEPATITIS A

## What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis is the name for several different illnesses all caused by an inflammation of the liver. Drinking alcohol and taking drugs can cause hepatitis, but it can also be caused by a viral infection. Hepatitis A is a disease caused by the Hepatitis A Virus (HAV). It is the most common type of hepatitis, with at least 1.4 million reported cases world wide every year. There are six different Hepatitis viruses (A, B, C, D, E, G) - Hepatitis A and E being the only two that are contagious. For information on viruses, please see the "Virus" fact sheet.



## What are the symptoms and the incubation time?

The most common symptoms for Hepatitis A are: jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes by bilirubin (a bile pigment) frequently caused by a liver problem), fatigue, sore muscles, headache, pain on the right side of the abdomen under the rib cage, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, dark urine, diarrhea and fever. Symptoms usually appear 15 to 50 days after exposure to the Hepatitis A Virus (HAV), with 30 days being the average. Symptoms are usually mild and may not be noticed in children younger than six years of age.

## How long do the symptoms last?

The symptoms will disappear over a six to twelve month period until complete recovery occurs. Hepatitis A will clear up by itself commonly without serious after effects. Once recovered, an individual is immune for life against the HAV.

## How is it diagnosed?

A doctor may suspect you have Hepatitis A based on your physical exam and medical history. If infection is suspected, your blood will be tested to find out if your liver is inflamed and whether antibodies to the HAV are present. Antibodies indicate that you have been exposed to the virus.

## Am I at severe risk for disease?

Symptoms of HAV may last for several weeks, but full recovery is usual.



## How does Hepatitis A spread?

The HAV is usually spread from person-to-person through food or water contaminated by feces from a Hepatitis A infected person. An infected person's hands can become infected after using the bathroom and the virus then spreads by direct contact or by food, beverages or other objects that were handled by the infected person. An infected individual can transmit the virus to others as early as two weeks before the symptoms begin to appear.

## How can I prevent getting Hepatitis A?

A Hepatitis A infection can be avoided by practicing good hygiene and sanitation. Wash your hands thoroughly after going to the bathroom, before preparing food and before eating. Getting vaccinated before international travel, as well as avoiding the consumption of tap/well water and uncooked foods in countries or regions where Hepatitis A is common can also prevent infection. With 21st century medicine Hepatitis A outbreaks of any kind are totally preventable!

### **How do I prevent spreading it to others?**

While infectious, be sure to wash your hands carefully after using the bathroom and clean bathrooms and toilets often, paying special attention to surfaces such as toilet seats, handles, taps and change tables. Do not share utensils, other personal care items, or handle food that will be eaten by other people

### **What is the treatment for Hepatitis A?**

In most cases, Hepatitis A will go away on its own, without use of medications. Home treatment will usually help relieve the symptoms and prevent the spreading of the HAV to others.

### **How prevalent is Hepatitis A in my water supply?**

Hepatitis A is relatively unusual in nations with developed water treatment systems, although water sources and facilities in rural and First Nations areas in Canada are quite poor and allow for the virus to enter the water meant for consumption. In general, water will only be contaminated if an infected person comes into contact with it after treatment and prior to consumption. When traveling internationally, it is important to avoid consuming water, un-bottled beverages, ice or uncooked foods because of the chance that the water source might be contaminated.

### **How can we protect our water supplies?**

Make certain that your water source is clean and well maintained. Water treatment plants put water through at least three different treatments to ensure that it is safe for consumption.