



# Hepatitis A Fact Sheet

## **What is hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes liver disease. In children it may be very mild, but most adults who develop hepatitis A are ill enough to miss about 4 to 6 weeks of work.

## **Who gets hepatitis A?**

Anyone can get hepatitis A, but it occurs more often in children.

## **How is the virus spread?**

The hepatitis A virus is found in the feces (stool) of infected persons. It is spread by direct, close contact and by diaper changing. Hepatitis A may be spread by food that has been prepared or handled by infected persons who do not wash their hands carefully. Hepatitis A may also be spread by water contaminated with human feces.

## **What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?**

Fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, tiredness, and a general feeling of being ill are usually the first symptoms. These may be followed in a few days by dark ("tea-colored") urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes). Infected persons usually feel better after 1-2 weeks, although they may continue to feel tired for a few more weeks. Infected children under the age of 3 often do not become ill.

## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The first symptoms usually appear after about 1 month, but can develop anytime between 2 to 6 weeks after infection.

## **How long can an infected person spread the virus?**

An infected person can spread the virus for 1-2 weeks before symptoms appear and for 2 weeks after jaundice occurs or other symptoms consistent with hepatitis A.

## **Can a person get hepatitis A again?**

After one infection with hepatitis A, a person cannot get it again. But, there are different kinds of hepatitis; infection with hepatitis A will not protect against getting other types of hepatitis.

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

Once a person is ill, there are no special medicines that will help. Generally, bed rest is all that is needed. Since hepatitis is an illness of the liver, infected persons should avoid drinking alcohol or taking drugs or medicines (including aspirin and Tylenol) without first asking their doctor.

## **What can be done after a person comes in contact with a person infected with hepatitis A?**

Immune globulin (previously called "gamma globulin") is a "shot" given to help prevent hepatitis. Hepatitis A is not spread at school, work, or by brief casual visits to the home of an infected person so fellow workers, schoolmates, etc., will not need to get a shot. Immune globulin is recommended for all household members and close (including sexual) contacts of a person with hepatitis A. The best time to give the shot is as soon as possible (within 2 weeks) after contact with someone who has hepatitis A.

## **How can the spread of hepatitis A be stopped?**

The spread of hepatitis A can be stopped by always washing hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after using the toilet or changing diapers. Children should be taught to always wash their hands with soap after using the toilet. Washing hands before preparing any food is important.