

# Hepatitis A

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## **What is hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is a viral infection of the liver. Hepatitis A can cause damage to the liver and create other health problems. Hepatitis A appears only as an acute infection and does not become chronic.

## **How is hepatitis A spread?**

The hepatitis A virus is spread through the fecal-oral route, meaning you must get something in your mouth that is contaminated with feces from an infected person.

Outbreaks may be due to water or food being contaminated with feces; eating raw or undercooked shellfish, mostly oysters, taken from waters contaminated with the virus; or eating food not cooked long enough at the correct temperature.

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

Symptoms are stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, lack of appetite, fever, and tiredness, joint pain, jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), and very dark urine. Children can be infected with hepatitis A and have no signs or symptoms.

Symptoms appear from 2 to 6 weeks after exposure to the virus. Symptoms usually develop over a period of several days. Symptoms usually last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill up to 6 months.

An infected person can transmit the disease to others for about two weeks before symptoms appear and for 7 to 14 days after the jaundice appears.

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

If you think that you have been exposed to hepatitis A, call your doctor immediately. An immune globulin shot is available and can prevent or lessen the severity of the disease. The shot **MUST** be given within 2 weeks after exposure.

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A infection. Infected people should get lots of bed rest, eat a balanced diet, drink fluids, avoid alcohol, and wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after using the bathroom.

Infected people should not share towels, washcloths, or soap, share eating utensils, or make or handle food that will be eaten by others until at least two weeks after their jaundice appears or symptoms are gone.

If you are a food-service worker, a health care worker, or a daycare worker, report your illness to your employer and do not work until your illness is over and your medical provider says it is safe to return to work.

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### **Calhoun County Public Health Department**

190 E. Michigan Avenue, Suite A100  
Battle Creek, Michigan 49014  
Tel: (269) 969-6383  
Fax: (269) 969-6488

## **Are there complications from hepatitis A?**

As a general rule, hepatitis A infection has a very low death rate with most cases resulting in complete recovery.

Death or serious illness may result when a person is also infected with hepatitis B or C or already has other liver diseases.

## **How can hepatitis A be prevented?**

Good sanitation and good hygiene are the keys to preventing hepatitis A. Specifically, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

- Before eating or preparing food
- After using the bathroom
- After diapering/toileting a small child.

There is a vaccine available that will protect against hepatitis A in persons 1 years of age and older. The vaccine is recommended for all children 12 through 23 months, for travelers to certain countries, and for certain adults who are at high risk of disease. Consult your doctor or the Calhoun County Public Health Department for more information.

## **How do I get more information on hepatitis A?**

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web Site: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/A/index.htm>

Phone: 800-CDC-INFO

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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