



Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by viruses such as hepatitis A, B, C, D, E and G, alcohol, some chemicals, or drugs.

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus. It may also be called 'Hep A'.

It is a different virus to hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

Deaths from hepatitis A are rare, but some people get very sick.

How do you get hepatitis A?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the faeces (poo) of people with the infection. It's usually spread by close personal contact with an infected person, or by eating or drinking contaminated (dirty) food or water.

Who is most at risk of hepatitis A?

You are most at risk of hepatitis A if:

- You live with someone who has hepatitis A.
- You do not practise good hygiene, especially hand washing.
- You work in a job where you may be exposed to the virus, including child care and sewage workers.
- You travel to other countries where hepatitis A is common.

Young children have very close contact with each other, so it's easy for the virus to spread between children, particularly if they're still in nappies.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms usually appear about 4 weeks after infection. Common symptoms include:

- tiredness
- body aches and pains
- loss of appetite
- nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting
- fever and chills
- upper stomach pain, usually on the right side
- eyes or skin turning yellow (jaundice).

Young children often have no symptoms, but most older children and adults do.

The symptoms usually last for a few weeks, but the tiredness can last longer.

How do I know I have hepatitis A?

Diagnosis is based on your symptoms and confirmed by a blood test showing IgM antibodies to hepatitis A.

If you suspect you or your child has hepatitis A, see your doctor as soon as possible.

Treatment of hepatitis A

Talk to your doctor. There is no special treatment for hepatitis A. Most people get well on their own after a few months, but a few older children and adults may need to go to hospital. Lots of rest and a good diet help. You can only get hepatitis A once.

While you have the disease

People who must not go to work at least 1 week after jaundice develops include:

- people who handle food or drink professionally
- child care or healthcare workers
- swimming instructors.



Check with your doctor.

If you have hepatitis A, don't prepare or handle other people's food.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

If you have had close contact with an infected person, see your doctor as soon as possible, as there are ways to stop or lessen the infection.

Hand washing and hygiene

Always wash your hands (use soap, and rub hands together really well for 15 seconds):

- after going to the toilet
- after changing nappies
- before eating
- before preparing food.

The hepatitis A virus can survive in damp places for weeks. If you or a family member has hepatitis A, you need to clean all surfaces which could have the virus on it for at least 1 week after jaundice develops. This includes door handles, toilet seats and handles, taps and nappy change tables.

Safer sex

Use dams (a thin latex square held over the vaginal or anal area during oral sex) to prevent spreading hepatitis A during oral or anal sex. You can get them from sexual health clinics and some chemists.

Overseas travel

If you are travelling to places where hepatitis A is common (including most developing countries), take special care to avoid infections. Be very careful when you choose or prepare food and drink. 'Cook it, peel it, boil it or forget it' is good advice. See your doctor and discuss your travel plans at least 6 weeks in advance.

Is there a vaccine for hepatitis A?

Yes. You need 2 vaccinations, 6 to 12 months apart for best protection. There is also a combined hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine.

Who should be vaccinated?

Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for:

- People travelling to places where hepatitis A is common (includes most developing countries).
- People living or working in remote Aboriginal communities.
- Staff in child care centres.
- People with an intellectual disability and their carers.
- Sewage workers.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People with chronic liver disease.

Talk to your doctor if you are thinking about hepatitis A vaccination.

Translated information about hepatitis A

[Arabic – hepatitis A \(PDF 182KB\)](#)

[Burmese – hepatitis A \(PDF 128KB\)](#)

[Chinese – hepatitis A \(PDF 294KB\)](#)

[French – hepatitis A \(PDF 96KB\)](#)

[Indonesian – hepatitis A \(PDF 215KB\)](#)

[Thai – hepatitis A \(PDF 184KB\)](#)

[Vietnamese – hepatitis A \(PDF 283KB\)](#)

Where to get help

- See your doctor.
- Ring Healthdirect Australia on 1800 022 222.



Remember

- Hepatitis A is a disease of the liver.
- It is spread by a virus.
- Hepatitis A is different to hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- A vaccination against hepatitis A is available.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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Acknowledgements

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Related sites

- [Hepatitis WA website](#)
- [Hepatitis Australia website](#)
- [Food Standards Australia New Zealand](#)