



HEPATITIS A VIRUS (HAV)

What is HEPATITIS A?

Hepatitis A (formerly known as infectious hepatitis) is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis A virus.

Who gets Hepatitis A virus?

Anyone can get Hepatitis A virus, but it generally occurs more frequently in children. Children may have mild infections or no symptoms at all and go unrecognized as a case of HAV. Another group of special concern is young adults from 15 to 30 years of age since they this age group is more socially active, participating in activities that may involve sharing food, beverages or other substances. They are frequently employed in food preparation and food service jobs, thus potentially exposing large numbers of other people.

How is the virus spread?

The Hepatitis A virus is spread from the feces of persons with Hepatitis A. The virus is often carried by minute particles on an infected person's hands. HAV can be spread by direct contact, or by placing something in the mouth that was contaminated by a person infected with HAV. Very few virus particles are required to transmit the infection. In some cases, drinking contaminated water can spread it. An increasing number of HAV cases are reported in drug users. Sharing contaminated drugs (especially injectable or inhalable drugs) or having close personal contact provide ideal methods for causing HAV to spread. Sneezing or coughing does not spread Hepatitis A virus.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A virus?

The symptoms of Hepatitis A virus may include any or all of the following: fatigue, poor appetite, fever, vomiting, dark urine, and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and/or whites of eyes). Very few deaths are caused by Hepatitis A. Most people recover in a few weeks without any complications. Infants and young children tend to have no symptoms or very mild symptoms and are less likely to develop jaundice than are older children and adults.

How soon do symptoms appear and how is it diagnosed?

Symptoms appear 15 to 50 days after exposure, but generally within 28 to 30 days. Since there are several types of viral Hepatitis, a blood test confirms which type of Hepatitis is present.

How long is an infected person able to spread the virus?

The contagious period begins about 14 days before symptoms appear and ends about seven days after jaundice appears. If jaundice is not present, the person should be considered infectious for the 14 days before symptoms started until 14 days after the start of symptoms. Infected persons with or without symptoms can spread the disease to others.

What is the treatment for Hepatitis A virus?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A virus infection. Doctors usually advise rest and good nutrition, and to avoid drugs and alcohol.

How can the spread of Hepatitis A virus be prevented?

The best way to prevent spread is careful hand washing after using the toilet or changing diapers. Infected people should not prepare or handle food for others during the contagious period. Household members, sex partners, drug partners or others in close contact with an infected person should call a doctor or the health department to get a shot of immune globulin. Immune globulin must be given within 14 days of exposure to be effective. For long-term protection, Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended and may be given simultaneously when administering immune globulin at a separate anatomic injection site.

24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

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