

Hep A FAQ

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis A virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months. Hepatitis A is usually spread when a person ingests the virus from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by feces or stool from an infected person.

What is the difference between Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C?

[Hepatitis A](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm)(<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm>), [Hepatitis B](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm)(<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm>), and [Hepatitis C](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm)(<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>) are diseases caused by three different viruses. Although each can cause similar symptoms, they have different modes of transmission and can affect the liver differently. Hepatitis A appears only as an acute or newly occurring infection and does not become chronic. People with Hepatitis A usually improve without treatment. Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C can also begin as acute infections, but in some people, the virus remains in the body, resulting in chronic disease and long term liver problems. There are vaccines to prevent Hepatitis A and B; however, there is not one for Hepatitis C. If a person has had one type of viral hepatitis in the past, it is still possible to get the other types.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is usually spread when the Hepatitis A virus is taken in by mouth from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the feces (or stool) of an infected person. A person can get Hepatitis A through:

- Person to person contact
 - when an infected person does not wash his or her hands properly after going to the bathroom and touches other objects or food
 - when a parent or caregiver does not properly wash his or her hands after changing diapers or cleaning up the stool of an infected person
 - when someone has sex or sexual contact with an infected person. (not limited to anal-oral contact)
- Contaminated food or water
 - Hepatitis A can be spread by eating or drinking food or water contaminated with the virus. (This can include frozen or undercooked food.) This is more likely to occur in countries where Hepatitis A is common and in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or poor personal hygiene. The food and drinks most likely to be contaminated are fruits, vegetables, shellfish, ice, and water. In the United States, chlorination of water kills Hepatitis A virus that enters the water supply.

Who is at risk for Hepatitis A?

Although anyone can get Hepatitis A, in the United States, certain groups of people are at higher risk, such as those who:

- Travel to or live in [countries where Hepatitis A is common](#)

- Are family members or caregivers of a recent adoptee from countries where Hepatitis A is common
- Live with someone who has Hepatitis A
- Are men who have sexual contact with other men
- Use illegal drugs, whether injected or not
- Have clotting-factor disorders, such as hemophilia
- Have sexual contact with someone who has Hepatitis A

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

Some people with Hepatitis A do not have any symptoms. If you do have symptoms, they may include the following:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (a yellowing of the skin or eyes)

How soon after exposure to Hepatitis A will symptoms appear?

If symptoms occur, they usually appear anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks after exposure. Symptoms usually develop over a period of several days.

How long do Hepatitis A symptoms last?

Symptoms usually last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill for as long as 6 months.

Can a person spread Hepatitis A without having symptoms?

Yes. Young children are less likely to have symptoms. In addition, a person can transmit the virus to others up to 2 weeks before symptoms appear and 1 week after symptoms appear.

How serious is Hepatitis A?

Almost all people who get Hepatitis A recover completely and do not have any lasting liver damage, although they may feel sick for months. Hepatitis A can sometimes cause liver failure and death, although this is rare and occurs more commonly in persons 50 years of age or older and persons with other liver diseases, such as Hepatitis B or C.

How is Hepatitis A treated?

There are no special treatments for Hepatitis A. Most people with Hepatitis A will feel sick for a few months before they begin to feel better. A few people will need to be hospitalized. During

this time, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. People with Hepatitis A should check with a health professional before taking any prescription pills, supplements, or over-the-counter medications, which can potentially damage the liver. Alcohol should be avoided.

Can Hepatitis A infection be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent Hepatitis A infection is through vaccination with the Hepatitis A vaccine. Vaccination is recommended for all children, for travelers to certain countries, and for people at high risk for infection with the virus. Those at high risk can be those who interact with the public in the industries of food service, health care, law enforcement and sanitation services.

What other precautions can be taken to prevent the spread of Hepatitis A?

Frequent handwashing. Always wash hands with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing food or handling food surfaces can help prevent the spread of Hepatitis A. For those who clean bathroom facilities or clean up after others and are exposed to fecal-contaminated objects and surfaces, gloves and protective clothing should be worn and all frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and sanitized using a chlorine bleach-water mix (1 and 2/3 cups bleach in 1 gallon water) with 1 minute of contact or other disinfectant effective against Hepatitis A. Clothes exposed to possible contamination should not touch other surfaces and should be laundered/washed in hot water and detergent.

What is the Hepatitis A vaccine?

The Hepatitis A vaccine is a shot of inactive Hepatitis A virus that stimulates the body's natural immune system. After the vaccine is given, it takes 10 days for the body to begin to make enough antibodies to provide protection, and about a month to be fully protected. An antibody is a substance found in the blood that is produced in response to a virus invading the body. These antibodies are then stored in the body and will fight off the infection if a person is exposed to the virus in the future.

Can Hepatitis A vaccine be given to immunocompromised persons, such as hemodialysis patients or persons with AIDS?

Yes. Because Hepatitis A vaccine is inactivated (not "live"), it can be given to people with compromised immune systems.

Is it harmful to have an extra dose of Hepatitis A vaccine or to repeat the entire Hepatitis A vaccine series?

No, getting extra doses of Hepatitis A vaccine is not harmful.

Is the County requiring special sanitation protocol be followed?

Environmental Management and Public Health are working with city and county departments to review cleaning protocols.