



**Louisiana Office of Public Health
Infectious Disease Epidemiology
Section**
Phone: 1-800-256-2748
www.oph.dhh.state.la.us

Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is caused by the hepatitis A virus and causes inflammation of the liver. It does not lead to chronic liver disease.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Young children often have no symptoms or very mild symptoms of disease. Adults and older children are more likely to have symptoms such as fever, loss of appetite, nausea, diarrhea, and a generally ill feeling.

The skin and whites of the eyes may take on a yellow color (jaundice). Stools and urine may be dark in color. A person who has no symptoms is still infectious to others. The symptoms may appear two to six weeks after exposure, but usually within three to four weeks.

Who gets hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A. The disease is rarely fatal and infected persons usually recover in a few weeks without complications. Household and sexual contacts of infected persons, international travelers, persons living on American Indian reservation, day care employees and attendees, homosexual men, and injection drug users are at an increased risk.

Once a person recovers from hepatitis A, they are immune for life and can no longer carry the virus.

Is hepatitis A common?

About one out of four person in Louisiana has been infected by hepatitis A. Most have been infected when they were children and they were not sick.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is spread by the fecal-oral route. This means the disease is spread by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of an infected person. It can also be spread when a person eats foods or drinks beverages that have been handled by a person infected with hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A can also be spread through some types of sexual contact.

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

The contagious period begins about a week before symptoms appear. Most cases are probably noninfectious after the first week of jaundice.

What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

There is no special medication or treatment that can be used once the symptoms appear. Generally, bed rest is all that is required.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

The single most effective way to prevent the spread of hepatitis A is careful handwashing after using the toilet.

Infected persons should not handle foods during the contagious period.

Household members and others in close contact with an infected person should call a doctor or the health department to obtain a shot of immune globulin, which if given early enough can minimize their chance of becoming ill.

Should a child infected with hepatitis A be excluded from day care?

If a child or adult in a child care facility is diagnosed with hepatitis A:

- Exclude the child or adult from the child care setting until 1 week after the onset of symptoms.
- Immediately notify your local health department and request advice. Immune serum globulin administered within the first 2 weeks after exposure can prevent the infection from spreading to other children and families.
- Use good hand washing and hygiene practices. Wash hands after each diaper change and disinfect the changing table or pad.

Is there a vaccine available?

A vaccine is available. The vaccine is recommended for people who travel or work in countries outside the United States that have high or intermediate endemicity, children over the age of two that live in communities with high rates of hepatitis A, men who have sex with men, street drug users, people with chronic liver disease, hemophiliacs, and people working with hepatitis A virus in an experimental lab setting.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control web page www.cdc.gov