



# Hepatitis A

## What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a short-term liver disease. It is the most common type of hepatitis reported in the U.S. In children, hepatitis A is usually mild, but adults who have hepatitis A may be ill enough to miss a few weeks of work. Hepatitis A is very rarely fatal.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

**The first symptoms** are usually loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, tiredness, diarrhea or constipation, fever, and abdominal pain. After a few days, people with hepatitis A may have dark (brown or “tea-colored”) urine, greyish (“clay-colored”) bowel movements, and/or jaundice (skin and whites of the eyes become yellow). People with hepatitis A usually feel better in one to two weeks, but it may take a few more weeks to fully recover.

## How is hepatitis A virus spread?

Hepatitis A virus is spread from **person to person** when germs from the bowel movements (feces) of a person with hepatitis A are swallowed. When germs are spread this way, it is called the “**fecal-oral**” route. Poor personal hygiene after using the restroom or changing diapers can leave feces with hepatitis A on a person’s hands. The virus can then be easily spread onto foods or objects that are placed in the mouths of other people.

## How soon do symptoms appear?

It usually takes about **one month or longer** before a person who came into contact with the hepatitis A virus to become ill. However, illness can happen anywhere **between two to six weeks** after contact.

## How long can an infected person spread the virus?

An infected person can spread the virus for **one to two weeks before** the symptoms begin, and for about **two weeks after** symptoms of dark urine, jaundice, or greyish stools occur.

## Who is at risk of getting hepatitis A?

Those at greatest risk of getting hepatitis A are household members, close friends/contacts, and sexual contacts of a person with hepatitis A. People at school, work, or who have casual contact with an infected person are at low risk of getting the disease. People who have had hepatitis A before, or who have been vaccinated, cannot get it.

## What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

There is no treatment for hepatitis A other than bed rest, drinking a lot of water, and eating a healthy diet. Since hepatitis A affects the liver, people with this disease should not drink alcohol or take any drugs (including aspirin and acetaminophen [Tylenol<sup>®</sup>]) without first asking their doctor.

## What can be done to protect a person who has been exposed to hepatitis A?

Post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is recommended to prevent illness for all household members and close (including sexual) contacts of a person with hepatitis A. PEP must be given within two weeks after the last direct contact with a person with hepatitis A.

The two types of PEP are the hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG). The hepatitis A vaccine is given to people between the ages of 12 months - 40 years, and IG is given to people outside that age range, and to people with certain health conditions. IG gives short-term protection, so people who receive IG can also get the hepatitis A vaccine for long-term protection.

## How can hepatitis A be prevented?

For long-term protection, the hepatitis A vaccine is best. To prevent person-to-person spread, careful hand washing after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food, is the single most important way to prevent spread of hepatitis A and other diseases.