

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A occurs worldwide, but is more common in developing countries.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of hepatitis A infection include:

- abdominal pain;
- loss of appetite and weight loss;
- nausea and sometimes vomiting;
- fever and chills;
- mild headache;
- yellow skin and eyes (jaundice); and/or
- dark urine and pale faeces.

Symptoms usually start within 28-30 days of exposure to the virus, but this can range from 15-50 days. Symptoms usually last for 1-2 weeks but can last for several months in some people.

People are infectious in the two weeks before symptoms appear, and remain infectious for a week after the onset of jaundice. Infants and young children infected with hepatitis A may not show symptoms of infection and may appear quite well. Unlike other types of hepatitis, hepatitis A does not cause long-term liver disease.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Most people get hepatitis A directly from an infected person. Transmission may occur when a person:

- eats food handled by an infectious person;
- touches nappies, linen or towels soiled by an infectious person;
- has direct contact (including sexual) with an infectious person; and/or
- drinks contaminated water.

Who is at risk of infection?

Those who have not had hepatitis A or who have not been vaccinated may be at risk of infection.

How is hepatitis A diagnosed and is there any treatment?

A diagnosis of hepatitis A is based on laboratory testing of a blood sample. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

Hepatitis A infection can be prevented by:

- washing hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, before preparing and eating food, and after handling soiled linen e.g. nappies;
- not sharing food, cutlery, crockery, cigarettes and drinks with other people;
- when travelling in regions with poor sanitation, drinking bottled water and avoid food that may have been cleaned or prepared using contaminated water; and
- vaccination.

Close contacts, including household contacts and sexual partners of an infectious person, can be given the vaccine (some high risk contacts may require immunoglobulin). This may prevent or reduce the severity of illness if given within two weeks of contact with the infectious person.

Vaccination

The hepatitis vaccine is safe and effective. A single dose of hepatitis A vaccine provides protective levels for at least a year. A second dose is recommended to provide long lasting protection.

Who should be vaccinated?

Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for:

- all travellers to, and all expatriates living in, moderately to highly endemic areas (including all developing countries). Country specific travel advice is available from www.smarttraveller.gov.au or from your GP;

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (from twelve months of age) residing in the NT, Qld, SA and WA;
 - people whose occupation may put them at risk, including child day-care workers, pre-school personnel, people who live or work in rural and remote indigenous communities, carers of people with intellectual disabilities, plumbers or sewage workers, and sex workers;
 - those whose lifestyle may put them at risk of acquiring hepatitis A, including men who have sex with men, and injecting drug users;
 - people with developmental disabilities;
 - people chronically infected with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C viruses; and
 - people with chronic liver disease.
- If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format—such as large print or audio—please telephone 13 2281 or email HealthACT@act.gov.au.
 - If English is not your first language and you require the translating and interpreting service—please telephone 131 450.
 - If you are deaf or hearing impaired and require the TTY typewriter service—please telephone (02) 13 3677, then ask for 13 2281.
 - Speak and listen users—phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 13 2281.
 - Internet Relay Users—connect to the NRS, then ask for 13 2281.

This vaccine is available on private prescription. There is also a combination hepatitis A/ hepatitis B vaccine and a combination hepatitis A/Typhoid vaccine.

Need more information?

For more information about hepatitis A, contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on **(02) 6205 2155**.

Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service *is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.*

Hepatitis A is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers.

Acknowledgements

1. Heymann, DL, 2008, *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 19th edition.
2. NHMRC, 2013. *The Australian Immunisation Handbook*, 10th edition.

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues, accessible to as many people as possible.

© Australian Capital Territory, Canberra.

Updated October 2014

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the Territory Records Office, Community and Infrastructure Services, Territory and Municipal Services, ACT Government, GPO Box 158, Canberra City ACT 2601.

Enquiries about this publication should be directed to ACT Government Health Directorate, Communications and Marketing Unit, GPO Box 825 Canberra City ACT 2601 or email: HealthACT@act.gov.au

www.health.act.gov.au | www.act.gov.au

Enquiries: Canberra 13ACT1 or 132281

HPS-00-0234