

Hepatitis A

What is it?

Hepatitis A is an infection caused by Hepatitis A virus (HAV) which causes swelling and irritation of the liver (known as Hepatitis).

Infection with one type of hepatitis virus does NOT mean that you cannot get the other two types of hepatitis.

How do I know if I have it?

Some people do not develop symptoms of Hepatitis A.

If you have symptoms, you may have aches and pains in your joints and muscles, a fever, not feel hungry, or have stomach pain.

Later you may have dark wee, pale poo and yellow eyeballs and skin (called jaundice).

You will usually be sick for about 1 – 3 weeks but sometimes longer. You will usually get completely better.

Small children who get hepatitis A usually show no signs.

Hepatitis A does NOT cause long-term liver problems.

People rarely die from Hepatitis A.

If you have contracted Hepatitis A, it can take between 2-7 weeks for symptoms to develop.

How did I get it?

You can pass on Hepatitis A to others for about 3 weeks- from two weeks before symptoms start until one week after jaundice starts. Lots of virus is found in your poo during the 3 week infectious period. The virus can survive in the environment for several weeks in the right conditions (for example, in sewage).

You get Hepatitis A by swallowing it in contaminated food, drinking water, handling nappies, linen and towels soiled with the poo of an infectious person or direct contact (including sexual) with person who has Hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A is common in parts of Africa, Asia, Central and South America, so you may be exposed when travelling to these places.

You can only get hepatitis A infection once.

How can I make sure I don't get it?

Washing your hands after going to the toilet, before eating, before preparing food or drink and after handling objects such as nappies and condoms. Use soap and running water for at least 10 seconds and dry your hands afterwards with a clean towel.

There is a vaccine for hepatitis A. The vaccine may take up to 2 weeks to work. Vaccination is recommended for the following groups of people:

Men who have sex with men.

- People who inject drugs.
- People going to countries where there are high levels of hepatitis A.
- People who often visit rural and remote indigenous communities.
- Child day-care and pre-school workers.

- Intellectually disabled people and their carers.
- Some health care workers who work in or with indigenous communities.
- Sewerage workers.
- Plumbers.
- Patients with chronic liver disease.

What can you do to keep other people safe?

If you have hepatitis A, remember to always wash your hands.

Until 1 week after you have jaundice you can still pass on the virus.

Remember the following:

- do **not** prepare food or drink for other people.
- do **not** share eating or drinking utensils with others.
- do **not** share sheets and towels with other people.
- do **not** have sex
- Wash knives, forks etc. in soapy water.
- Wash sheets and towels in washing machine.

If you have hepatitis A and work in these jobs, **do not go to work** if

- You handle food or drink.
- Your work involves close personal contact, such as child carers and health workers.

Children and adolescents should not attend childcare facilities or school while infectious.

All patients should check with their doctor before returning to work or school.

How do I test for it?

If you have the symptoms / signs above, go to your doctor.

A blood test will show if you have hepatitis A.

How can I get rid of it?

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A.

Who do I need to tell and why?

If you have hepatitis A tell your sexual partner so they can be vaccinated or tested.

You may have to tell housemates who have shared knives and forks, clothing or linen with you.

Your doctor can help you decide who to tell and help you to contact them.

This fact sheet is just some general information. If you are worried about your health go and see a doctor.

For more information or support visit:

For more information on STIs and safe sex visit the Play Safe website: www.playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au

Sexual Health Info Link is a service that you can call up for information on STIs and sexual health. It's anonymous and non-judgemental. Call: 1800 451 624 or visit <https://www.shil.nsw.gov.au/>

“Let them know” allows you to send an anonymous messages to tell someone you’ve had sex with that they have come into contact with the infection: <http://www.letthemknow.org.au/>