



## **Hepatitis A Fact Sheet**

### **What is Hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Not everyone with hepatitis A has symptoms. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 2 to 7 weeks after infection and can include:

- |                          |                                     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ✓ Yellow skin or eyes    | ✓ Fever                             |
| ✓ Loss of appetite       | ✓ Dark urine or light colored stool |
| ✓ Nausea (upset stomach) | ✓ Diarrhea                          |
| ✓ Vomiting               | ✓ Joint pain                        |
| ✓ Stomach pain           | ✓ Feeling tired                     |

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

### **How is hepatitis A spread?**

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool and blood of people who are infected. The hepatitis A virus is spread when someone ingests the virus usually through:

- **Person-to-person contact**

Hepatitis A can be spread from close, personal contact with an infected person, such as through having sex, caring for someone who is ill, or using drugs with others. Hepatitis A is very contagious, and people can even spread the virus before they feel sick.

- **Eating contaminated food or drink**

Contamination of food with hepatitis A virus can happen at any point: growing, harvesting, processing, handling, and even after cooking. Contamination of food and water happens more often in countries where hepatitis A is common. Although uncommon, foodborne outbreaks have occurred in the United States from people eating contaminated fresh and frozen imported food products.

### **How is hepatitis A diagnosed and treated?**

A doctor can determine if you have hepatitis A by discussing your symptoms and taking a blood sample for testing. To treat the symptoms of hepatitis A, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. Some people will need medical care in a hospital.

### **How can hepatitis A be prevented?**

Vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of hepatitis A. The vaccine series usually consists of 2 shots, given 6 months apart. Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for:

- All children at 12 months of age
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common
- Family and caregivers of adoptees from countries where hepatitis A is common
- Men who have sexual encounters with other men

- People who use or inject drugs
- People with chronic or long-term diseases, including hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- People with clotting factor disorders
- People with direct contact with others who have hepatitis A
- People experiencing homelessness

### **What if I am exposed to hepatitis A?**

If you were recently exposed to hepatitis A virus and have not been vaccinated against hepatitis A, you might benefit from an injection of either hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin. However, the vaccine or immune globulin are only effective if given within the first 2 weeks after exposure. A health professional can decide what is best based on your age and overall health.

Post-exposure prophylaxis is necessary if any of the following apply to you:

- You live with someone who has hepatitis A.
- You have had sexual contact, or other intimate contact, with a person who has hepatitis A.
- You are a child or an employee at a childcare program in which another child or employee has hepatitis A.

### **Childcare Programs and Food Establishments**

Notify Public Health immediately about any day care attendees or food handlers who are infected with hepatitis A. They may provide additional post-exposure prophylaxis recommendations for others who may be at risk for infection.