

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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## Hepatitis A

### What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is swelling and tenderness of the liver caused by the Hepatitis A virus.

### What are the symptoms?

Some people have no symptoms. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children. Symptoms are abdominal pain, fever, tiredness, loss of appetite and nausea followed by yellowing of the skin and eyes.

### How is Hepatitis A spread?

The most common way the disease is spread is from person to person by hands contaminated with feces. Outbreaks may be due to water or food being contaminated with feces; eating raw or undercooked shellfish, mostly oysters, taken from waters contaminated with the virus; or eating food not cooked long enough at the correct temperature.

### How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

Symptoms may appear from 2-6 weeks after exposure. The average time is about one month.

### How long is a person contagious with Hepatitis A?

Most people are contagious for two weeks before symptoms begin and for a few days to one week after the symptoms first appear.

### What are the complications of Hepatitis A infection?

Almost all people recover completely. Death or serious illness may result when a person is also infected with Hepatitis B or C or already has other liver disease.

### Is there a treatment for Hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A infection. However, it is important to have a doctor follow the course of the infection. The doctor can recommend symptomatic measures such as rest, change in diet, etc.

### How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

Good sanitation and good hygiene are key to preventing Hepatitis A. Specifically, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:

- before eating or preparing food
- after using the bathroom
- after diapering/toileting a small child

There is a vaccine that will prevent Hepatitis A infection. It is recommended for all children, travelers to some foreign countries, and people who are at risk of complications from Hepatitis A infection. After exposure to Hepatitis A there are shots that may prevent the disease if given within two weeks of exposure.

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## **HAND WASHING INSTRUCTIONS:**

- use soap and running water
- rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- wash all surfaces, including:
  - backs of hands
  - wrists
  - between fingers
  - under fingernails
- rinse well
- dry hands with a paper towel
- turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands

**For more information on Hepatitis A, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.**

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