

facts about...

HEPATITIS A

A VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASE

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that infects the liver. People infected with Hepatitis A vary in how sick they feel. The younger you are when you become infected, the less likely you are to feel sick. However, the majority of adults will feel unwell, lose their appetite, develop nausea and fatigue and may feel they have the flu. Some people go off coffee and cigarettes. Many people develop jaundice, a yellow tinge in the whites of the eyes and skin. The urine may become very dark. Rarely, people develop an intense itch.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is spread from person to person, or through food contaminated with faeces that contain the Hepatitis A virus. There are other hepatitis viruses which are spread through sexual activity (Hepatitis B) or through blood contact, such as sharing needles (Hepatitis B and C). This rarely happens with Hepatitis A.



How do I know if I have Hepatitis A?

If your GP suspects you have Hepatitis A they will arrange a blood test to check your liver function and see if you have antibodies to the Hepatitis A virus in your blood. There are two sorts of antibody: the IgM, which shows that you have the infection now, and the IgG, which shows you have had the infection in the past. Many adults have IgG antibodies without any memory of ever being jaundiced because they had Hepatitis when they were small children and weren't very sick at all.

Who is infectious?

People are most infectious before they become sick, when they don't know anything is wrong.

By the time you know you have Hepatitis A you aren't very infectious at all. Young children may be infectious but show no obvious signs of infection. You may want to ask your doctor if family members should be vaccinated to reduce their chance of becoming infected..

How is Hepatitis A treated?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A. Most people feel unwell for a week or two and then gradually get better. However, it's best to avoid alcohol and, if possible, medication while the liver is inflamed from the virus. People with Hepatitis A are sometimes sick enough to go to hospital but this is very rare.

Can I get chronic liver damage from Hepatitis A?

No. Unlike Hepatitis B and C, Hepatitis A does not cause chronic liver damage or cirrhosis of the liver.

Can I be infected with Hepatitis A again?

No. Once you have had Hepatitis A you become immune to further infection with this specific virus.

Who is most at risk of infection?

- People who travel to Third World countries
- Child care workers
- People who inject drugs
- Men who have sex with men
- People who live in institutions
- Sewerage workers
- Health care workers
- Aboriginal people, and people working in indigenous communities

What can I do to protect myself from Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis a infection can be prevented. There is a safe and effective vaccine for Hepatitis A available. You can get this through your GP.

There is also a vaccine that protects against both Hepatitis A and the more serious Hepatitis B. Some people may be advised to have this vaccine.



If you are travelling to Asia or another part of the world where there is a high level of Hepatitis A or if you are at risk because of your profession, you should discuss vaccination with your doctor.

This information booklet has been designed by the Digestive Health Foundation as an aid to people who have Hepatitis A or for those who wish to know more about it. This is not meant to replace personal advice from your medical practitioner.

The Digestive Health Foundation (DHF) is an educational body committed to promoting better health for all Australians by promoting education and community health programs related to the digestive system.

The DHF is the educational arm of the Gastroenterological Society of Australia, the professional body representing the Specialty of gastrointestinal and liver disease in Australia. Members of the Society are drawn from physicians, surgeons, scientists and other medical specialties with an interest in GI disorders.

Since its establishment in 1990 the DHF has been involved in the development of programs to improve community awareness and the understanding of digestive diseases.

Research and education into gastrointestinal disease are essential to contain the effects of these disorders on all Australians.

Further information on a wide variety of gastrointestinal conditions is available on our website.