

# FactSheet

Para Su Información

## Hepatitis A (Infectious Hepatitis)

### **What is hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is a disease caused by the hepatitis A virus that results in inflammation of the liver. Formerly, hepatitis A was called infectious hepatitis. In children the disease is usually mild, but most adults who develop hepatitis are sick enough to miss four to six weeks of work.

### **Who gets hepatitis A?**

Anyone can get hepatitis A.

### **How is the virus spread?**

The hepatitis A virus is found in the feces (stool) of infected persons and is usually spread by the fecal-oral route. Hepatitis A may be spread by food prepared or handled by an infected person who does not wash his/her hands carefully. Hepatitis A may be spread by water contaminated with human feces or by consumption of raw oysters. It may also be spread by close intimate contact (household or sexual) and by changing the diaper of an infected child.

### **What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?**

The first symptoms are usually fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and malaise. This is usually followed by dark colored urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes). In general, the severity of illness increases with age and children under age three may not have symptoms, though they can still spread the infection. Most people feel better after one to two weeks, but may continue to feel tired for a few more weeks.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Usually the first symptoms appear at about one month, but can develop anytime between two and six weeks after exposure to the virus.

### **How long can an infected person spread the virus?**

People are most infectious in the two weeks before their symptoms appear and remain somewhat infectious about one week after jaundice.

### **Can a person get hepatitis A again?**

After one infection with hepatitis A, a person cannot get it again. However, there are different types of viral hepatitis, and infection with hepatitis A will not protect against other types of hepatitis.

### **What is the treatment for hepatitis A?**

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Bed rest is generally all that is needed. Infected persons should also avoid alcohol, drugs, or medicines (including aspirin and Tylenol), without checking with a doctor.

### **What should I do if I was 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 immune globulin or Hepatitis A vaccine. However, the vaccine or immune globulin must be given within the first 2 weeks after exposure to be effective. A health professional can decide what is best on the basis of your age and overall health.

### **How can the spread of hepatitis A be stopped?**

The spread of hepatitis A can be stopped by always washing hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing a diaper. Children should be taught to wash their hands with soap and warm water after using the toilet. Washing hands before preparing food is very important.

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Hepatitis A vaccine is now available in the U.S. for persons 2 years of age or older. To be fully immunized, a person needs a second injection of vaccine 6 to 12 months after the first injection. The vaccine is recommended for anyone traveling to an endemic area. Persons who eat out frequently, children who attend childcare centers, or people who engage in high-risk activities may want to consider immunization for hepatitis A. Persons who work in childcare centers, or as foodhandlers in Clark County are required to be immunized against hepatitis A.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Contact your doctor or the Southern Nevada Health District, Office of Epidemiology at (702) 759-1300.



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