

FACT SHEET

Hepatitis A Virus (HAV)

Hepatitis A (HAV) is liver disease caused by the Hepatitis A virus that happens worldwide. The virus is found in the stool/feces of an infected person. Consuming foods or drinking water contaminated with the feces of an infected person is the primary means of HAV transmission in the United States. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm>

Typically the virus is spread by an infected person two weeks before the symptoms appear. Symptoms usually appear between 15 to 50 (average of 28-30) days after exposure. On average, infected adults lose more than five weeks of work. As many as 22% of patients are hospitalized.

The Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for infants and children to age 23 months and for adults and children who travel.

Symptoms: Hepatitis A symptoms include acute onset of fever, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and appetite loss, dark urine, followed by jaundice (yellowing skin and in whites of the eyes) . The infection in children under one year of age is often mild and most children do not show symptoms, although they excrete the virus in their feces. Children show a greater incidence of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Because young children are at high risk for fecal contamination by their hands, they can be efficient transmitters of the disease. In contrast, most adults develop symptoms and about 20 percent of patients may have reoccurrences of the disease that can last as long as 15 months.

Risks: Among cases of HAV reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) known risk factors include close personal contact with a person infected with HAV, international travel, household or personal contact with a child who attends a childcare center; household or personal contact with a newly arriving international adoptee, a known foodborne outbreak, men who have sex with men, and use of illegal drug use.

Spread: The virus can be spread by infected persons who: don't wash their hands thoroughly after going to the bathroom; having sexual contact with an infected person; or changing the diaper of an infected child and not washing hands. Outbreaks among children attending day care centers and persons employed at centers have long been recognized because infection in children under 6 years of age is often asymptomatic; outbreaks are recognized when adult contacts become ill. Poor hygiene among children who wear diapers and the handling and changing of diapers by staff contribute to the spread of Hepatitis A infections.

Treatment: Supportive.

Prevention: Hepatitis A vaccine stimulates the body's immune system, helping to protect you once exposed to the virus. Two immunizations will offer longer protection against the virus.

Short-term protection against hepatitis A is available from immune globulin. It can be given before and within two weeks of coming in contact with the Hepatitis A virus.

Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before preparing and eating food.

Recommendations: Hepatitis A vaccine for adults and children traveling from the United States to areas of increased risk of infection such as: Mexico, Central and South America, Parts of the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean basin and The Middle East. Call your local health department for information on travel immunizations.