

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources

Information for the Public on Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by a virus which is found in the stool (bowel movement) of an infected person. People with hepatitis A can be very sick, but they almost always get well again. There is no treatment for hepatitis A.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is spread from person to person by hands that have not been washed after going to the bathroom or by touching items such as diapers or linens soiled by stool.

It is also spread by contaminated water or ice and by eating uncooked foods that may have become contaminated during handling.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Symptoms of hepatitis A can include the following:

- Tiredness
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Dark urine
- Loss of appetite
- Yellowing of the skin and eyeballs (jaundice)
- Nausea

Persons with acute hepatitis A are most infectious from two weeks before onset of symptoms to one week after onset.

Infants and preschool children may have no symptoms of hepatitis A infection, but still pass the virus on to others.

Who is at risk for hepatitis A?

- People who live with or have sex with an infected person.
- Children and staff of child care centers where a child or employee has hepatitis A.
- Residents and staff of centers for disabled children when a child or employee has hepatitis A.
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common and where there is little clean water or proper sewage disposal.

Is there a cure for hepatitis A?

No. There is no medicine for hepatitis A once you have it. Immune globulin can be taken within two weeks after exposure to prevent or lessen symptoms.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

- Always wash your hands after using the bathroom.
- Always wash your hands after cleaning the toilet.
- Always wash your hands after changing diapers.
- Always wash your hands after handling soiled towels or linens.
- Always wash your hands before fixing food or eating.
- If exposed to hepatitis A, ask your doctor about immune globulin.
- If traveling to areas where hepatitis A is common:
 - ▶ get immune globulin or vaccination before travel;
 - ▶ drink bottled beverages; and
 - ▶ do not eat uncooked fruits or vegetables, unless you peel them yourself.