

Hepatitis A



Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.



Hepatitis A infection is a notifiable condition¹

How hepatitis A is spread

The infection is spread when traces of faeces (containing hepatitis A virus) contaminate hands, objects, water or food and the virus is then taken in by mouth. Hepatitis A virus is extremely durable in the environment.

In Australia, most cases of hepatitis A are associated with the activities below. It is occasionally transmitted during sexual activity where faecal-oral contact occurs and rarely is transmitted by blood transfusion.

- > childcare centres enrolling children not yet toilet trained
- > sexual and household contacts of people infected with hepatitis A
- > overseas travel to high risk countries
- > injecting and non-injecting drug use.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms include:

- > abdominal pain
- > loss of appetite
- > weight loss
- > nausea (and sometimes vomiting)
- > fever and chills
- > mild headache
- > tiredness
- > yellow skin and eyes (jaundice) (see image)
- > dark urine and pale faeces.

Adults and older children are more likely to have symptoms lasting 1 to 2 weeks, or in severe cases, up to several months.

Children under age 3 rarely have symptoms.

Most people recover fully and subsequently will have life-long immunity. Death from hepatitis A is rare.



Image Courtesy Public Health Image Library (PHIL), Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC-USA) CDC, Dr. Thomas F. Sellers / Emory University

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is made by a blood test.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Generally 15 to 50 days, usually 28 to 30 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

A person is considered infectious from 2 weeks prior to the onset of illness, to 2 weeks after the onset of illness (or 1 week after the onset of jaundice, if it occurs).

Treatment

There is no specific antiviral treatment for hepatitis A. Rest, good fluid intake and alteration in diet may decrease symptoms. Severely ill people require admission to hospital.

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Prevention

- > [Exclude people with hepatitis A from childcare, preschool, school and work](#) for 7 days after the onset of jaundice (if present) or 2 weeks from the onset of illness if there is no jaundice.
- > Follow good personal hygiene practices, especially thorough [hand washing](#).
- > Good food handling procedures should always be followed.
- > A single dose of hepatitis A vaccine provides protection within 2 weeks of having the vaccine. A second dose 6 months later gives long lasting protection. See [Hepatitis A vaccine](#) for detailed information on people for whom the vaccine is recommended.

Immunisation and immunoglobulin

- > [Hepatitis A vaccine](#) can prevent hepatitis A infection in a contact of a person who has hepatitis A if it is given no later than 14 days after the onset of symptoms in the person with hepatitis A infection. The vaccine is offered to household contacts and/or sexual contacts of the person with hepatitis A who are not already immune to hepatitis A. A contact is any person who has been close enough to an infected person to be at risk of getting the infection from that person.
- > If contacts are under 1 year of age, have a lowered immune system, have chronic liver disease, or for whom vaccine is contraindicated, normal human immunoglobulin can be offered. Immunoglobulin is a solution containing human antibodies that is made from blood products.
- > Contacts (including those given vaccine or immunoglobulin) may remain infectious to others even if they do not develop symptoms themselves and should therefore continue to follow good personal hygiene practices.

- > If a person with hepatitis A is a food handler by occupation, vaccine (or immunoglobulin if in one of the groups for whom vaccine is not recommended) should be administered to the other food handlers working in the same establishment.
- > Under certain circumstances vaccine (or immunoglobulin) may be offered to staff and children at childcare facilities.

Useful links

- > [Hand hygiene](#)
- > [Immunisation](#)
- > [Protecting yourself and your health whilst travelling overseas](#)
- > [Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E summary](#)
- > [Vaccines](#)
- > [When you have a notifiable condition](#)
- > [Immunisation programs](#)
- > [Exclusion periods from childcare, preschool, school and work](#)

1 – In South Australia the law requires doctors and laboratories to report some infections or diseases to SA Health. These infections or diseases are commonly referred to as 'notifiable conditions'.

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You've Got What? 5th Edition

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The SA Health Disclaimer for this resource is located at

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat

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This document has been reviewed and endorsed by SQCAG* for consumers and the community – February 2018.

*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group.



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