



# Fact Sheet: Hepatitis A

## What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a disease caused by the Hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A can cause damage to the liver and create other health problems. Most people recover without any problems, although it may take several weeks to feel “normal” again.

## What are the symptoms?

- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea
- Lack of appetite
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes
- Dark colored urine
- Clay-colored (gray) bowel movements
- Abdominal pain – tenderness of the liver

Symptoms appear from 14 to 55 days after exposure to the virus. It is common for infected children to have no symptoms at all. Anyone who has hepatitis A can pass the disease to others for about 2 weeks before symptoms appear and for 7 to 14 days after the jaundice (yellowing of the skin) appears.

## How is it spread?

Hepatitis A virus is spread by the fecal-oral route. (This means that you must get something in your mouth that is contaminated with feces from an infected person). Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has Hepatitis A. Sometimes, infection results from eating food or drink that is contaminated with the Hepatitis A virus. *Hepatitis A is not spread by sneezes or coughs.* Incubation 15 - 50 days with an average of 30 days

## How is it treated?

If you think you have been exposed, call your doctor immediately. An immune globulin shot is available and can prevent or lessen the severity of the disease. The shot must be given within 2 weeks after exposure to the virus. There is no treatment for a person with Hepatitis A.

## Infected people should:

- Get lots of bed rest.
- Eat a well balanced diet.
- Drink fluids (fruit juices and water).
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after using the toilet.

## Infected people should not:

- Share towels, washcloths or soap.
- Share eating utensils.
- Make or handle food that will be eaten by others until at least 2 weeks after their jaundice appears or symptoms are gone.

If you are a food-service worker, a health care worker, or a day-care worker: report your illness to your supervisor and do not work until your illness is over and your medical provider says it is OK to return to work.

## How is it prevented?

The best way to prevent the spread of Hepatitis A is to wash your hands after using the toilet.

You should always wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before eating or preparing food.

Vaccines are also available for long-term protection against Hepatitis A in persons 2 years of age and older. Consult your doctor about being vaccinated.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self -diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or 257-3612*

Visit our website at: [www.gchd.us](http://www.gchd.us) or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Genesee County Health Department**  
630 S. Saginaw Street  
Flint, Michigan 48502-1540

*"Better Life through Better Health"*