

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A, formerly known as infectious hepatitis, is an infection of a person's liver, which is caused by a virus. Approximately 20,000 cases of hepatitis A are reported each year in the United States. In various communities, 15% - 40% of reported hepatitis A cases are associated with spread within child care centers.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

The illness usually produces a sudden fever, nausea, vomiting, a general tired or weak feeling, dark-colored urine and jaundice (yellowing of skin and whites of eyes). These symptoms begin about 2 - 6 weeks after contact with the virus. School-age children and adults will usually become ill, but **many children less than 3 years of age may have no symptoms**. An adult who develops hepatitis A may be ill long enough to miss about one month of work. Most people recover completely.

How do you get Hepatitis A?

Persons become infected by getting hepatitis A virus into their mouths. The virus is found in the stool (bowel movement or feces) of an infected person for about two weeks before becoming ill and for 1-2 weeks after jaundice develops. Infected children who have no symptoms are as able to spread hepatitis A as infected children who are ill. The virus can be spread by direct contact with infected children, during diaper-changing, or by playing with stool-contaminated toys and other objects.

How is Hepatitis A diagnosed?

The diagnosis of hepatitis A is made by a doctor based on the person's symptoms and on blood tests. An infected person with no symptoms will still show signs of the hepatitis A infection in the person's blood.

What can prevent illness if a person is exposed to Hepatitis A?

Post exposure prophylaxis can be given within 14 days of exposure. This is a shot that is given to prevent hepatitis. This will reduce the risk of coming down with the illness if given within 2 weeks after the last contact with a person who has hepatitis A.

What should be done when a child care center has Hepatitis A?

Since fewer than 1 in 10 infected diaper-aged children have symptoms, outbreaks in child care centers commonly are not recognized until workers and parents begin getting ill. If hepatitis is found in a child care center, the center should not close and parents should be discouraged from transferring their children to other centers. Transferring children only helps spread the disease to other centers.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

Increasing good hygiene practices in staff, parents and children can successfully stop the spread of hepatitis. Prevention measures include the following:

- Wash hands carefully with soap, warm water, and friction for at least 15 seconds after changing any diapers or handling stool-soiled material from any persons.
- Wash hands carefully with soap, warm water, and rubbing together for at least 15 seconds after each bowel movement.3. Make soap easily accessible to all employees and children.
- Ensure that all children wash hands with warm running water and soap and dry hands with disposable towels after each trip to the bathroom.
- Dispose of soiled paper diapers and place stool-soiled cloth diapers in plastic bag that seals tightly to return to parent for laundering.
- Change diapers on a changing table with an impermeable surface. Clean the changing table with an appropriate solution (a 1:100 dilution, or one-quarter cup of bleach per gallon of water, prepared daily and dispensed in a spray bottle). Spray the surface with

this solution after each diaper change and wipe with a disposable towel. Diapering should not take place on any play tables or tables on which food is prepared or children eat.

- Separate food preparation and feeding duties strictly from diaper-changing and toilet cleaning responsibilities.
- Wash toys at least daily with a bleach solution.
- Disinfect accessory items (such as containers of baby powder or jars of Vaseline) daily as they can accidentally be soiled during a diaper-change.
- Wash any stool-soiled items (floor, beds, toys, etc.) immediately.
- Ensure all children wash their hands with warm running water and soap before meals or snacks.
- **Wash hands carefully before preparing or handling any food. This step is especially important.**

If you become aware of a possible case of hepatitis in a child, family member, or worker in the child care center, you should immediately notify the

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