

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes liver disease. In children it may be very mild, but some adults who develop hepatitis A are ill enough to miss about 4 to 6 weeks of work.

Who gets hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A, but it occurs more often in children.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Fever, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, tiredness, occasionally frequent loose stools, and a general feeling of being ill are usually the first symptoms. These symptoms may be followed in a few days by dark ("tea-colored") urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes). Infected persons usually feel better after 1-2 weeks. They may continue to feel tired for a few more weeks.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The first symptoms usually appear after about 1 month after infection, but can develop anytime between 2 to 6 weeks after infection.

How is the virus spread?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the feces (stool) of infected persons. For transmission or spread to occur, the hepatitis A virus must enter the mouth of a susceptible individual. Foods may be contaminated when infected food handlers do not wash their hands carefully and directly touch foods that are eaten uncooked or food after it has been cooked.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

An infected person can spread the virus for 1-2 weeks before symptoms appear and for 1 week after symptom onset occurs.

Can a person get hepatitis A again?

After one infection with hepatitis A, a person cannot get it again. However, there are different kinds of hepatitis; infection with hepatitis A will not protect against getting other types of hepatitis.

What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

Once a person is ill, there are no special medicines that will help. Generally, bed rest is all that is needed. Hepatitis is an illness of the liver. Infected persons should avoid drinking alcohol or taking drugs or medicines (including aspirin and Tylenol) without first asking their doctor.

What can be done after a person comes in contact with a person infected with hepatitis A?

Post exposure prophylaxis can be given within 14 days of the last exposure to reduce the risk of coming down with disease. This is a "shot" given to help prevent hepatitis A. Co-workers of food handlers infected with hepatitis A are advised to get the shot as soon as possible, but at least within 14 days after contact with someone with disease. This shot is also recommended for all household members and close (including sexual and drug sharing) contacts of a person with hepatitis A. This shot must be given within 14 days. It is important to note that the shot does not guarantee that hepatitis A will not occur, however it may lower the risk of serious illness.

Is there a vaccine to prevent hepatitis A?

The hepatitis A vaccine was licensed in the U.S. in June 1995. It is recommended for all children at age 12-23 months, travelers to areas where disease is more common, military personnel, certain ethnic and geographic populations, people living in, or relocating to areas of where hepatitis A is common, persons engaging in high-risk sexual activity (such as men who have sex with men), users of illicit injectable drugs, and residents of a community experiencing an outbreak of hepatitis A.

How can the spread of hepatitis A be stopped?

The spread of hepatitis A can be stopped by always washing hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after using the toilet. It is extremely important that food handler employees not handle food or drinks when they feel ill. Employees should notify their local county health department if they develop signs or symptoms similar to those of hepatitis A.