



London Health Protection Team Factsheet: Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus which causes your liver to become swollen and tender.

What are the symptoms?

After the virus enters the body, there are no symptoms for two to six weeks. Some people, particularly young children, may only have a mild illness. They may not know they are infected although they can pass on the virus to others. A few people, especially the elderly, develop a serious illness and need to be looked after in hospital.

General symptoms are often mistakenly diagnosed as flu (tiredness, aches and pains, a fever and/or loss of appetite). You may also experience sickness, stomach ache and/or diarrhoea. These symptoms may last for a week or more. Then **jaundice** may develop. Jaundice is easily noticeable because the whites of the eyes go yellow, and in more serious cases the skin goes yellow, urine may turn dark and bowel motions become pale.

It will take a while to recover from hepatitis A. Most people feel better within a few weeks although they may feel tired and lack energy for many more months. Once you have recovered, you will never be infected with hepatitis A again. Unlike other hepatitis viruses, Hepatitis A does not cause long-term liver damage.

How is Hepatitis A passed on?

Hepatitis A is passed from person to person by eating food or drinking water contaminated with the virus. Fruit, vegetables and uncooked food washed in contaminated water can cause infection, especially in hot countries. Shellfish can be infected if it comes from sea contaminated with sewage. Cooked food is safe but can be contaminated if it has been handled by someone with the virus. The virus is passed out in the bowel motions of an infected person. The illness can spread easily within families and where people live closely together. It can also be caught after caring for infected people.

How do I prevent passing it on to others?

The most important way of ensuring that it is not passed on to other people is by maintaining personal hygiene so that other people do not come into contact with the virus in your faeces. This means that you must make sure that your **hands are washed thoroughly**

- After going to the toilet
- Before preparing and eating meals
- After dealing with sick people, their clothing/bedding
- After dealing with soiled nappies/clothing

Who can I call if I need additional information?

Your GP or NHS 111