Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that affects the liver. It is not common in Australia, and most cases are found in people who have recently travelled overseas.

Hepatitis A is a different virus to the other types of hepatitis you may have heard about, such as hepatitis B and C.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone can get hepatitis A. Those at highest risk may include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in remote and rural communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland.
- Those who have recently travelled overseas to an area where hepatitis A is common.
- Those who work in an environment where the risk of being exposed to faeces is higher (for example, a child care centre or a sewage worker).
- Men who have sex with men.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms appear between 15 and 50 days after being exposed to the virus and may include:

- Fevers and chills
- Nausea and loss of appetite
- Tiredness
- Body aches and pains, including stomach pain
- Dark urine and/or light-coloured stools, and
- Jaundice (yellowish skin and eyes).

Symptoms may last for several weeks. Most children under the age of 5 do not show symptoms.

There is usually a full recovery with lifelong immunity after an infection.

How is Hepatitis A diagnosed?

A diagnosis of hepatitis A is confirmed with a blood test.
**Hepatitis A**
**Patient Information**

**Contact information**
Ph: 03 9076 3139

Infection Prevention
– The Alfred
55 Commercial Road,
Melbourne VIC 3004
Tel: (03) 9076 2000
alfredhealth.org.au

---

**How is hepatitis A spread?**

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of an infected person. The virus can survive for many hours outside of the body surfaces, or in food and water. The virus spreads when a person puts something in their mouth that has been contaminated by an infected person’s faeces. For example, we sometimes see hepatitis A outbreaks in childcare centres because childcare workers handle dirty nappies, and children like to share toys.

**How can we stop it from spreading?**

Cleaning your hands regularly, especially after going to the toilet or before preparing food, is the most important way to prevent the spread of hepatitis A.

Vaccination is available for hepatitis A and is recommended for high risk groups.

If you have been recently diagnosed with hepatitis A, you will probably receive a phone call from the Department of Health to gather more information about how you acquired hepatitis A, and if others may be at risk.

**How will I be cared for in hospital?**

**Accommodation:** You will be cared for in a single room with your own bathroom while you have symptoms. Staff will wear gowns and gloves when providing direct care to you.

**Hand hygiene:** It is important that staff, patients and visitors clean their hands every time they enter or leave your room. They can use the provided alcohol-based hand rub, or soap and water.

**It’s OK to ask:** Please feel free to remind your health care worker to clean their hands.

**Cleaning:** Your room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly, with a focus on surfaces that are frequently touched.

**What is the treatment?**

There is no specific treatment available for hepatitis A, however:
- Your doctor will let you know if there are any medications that may help relieve your symptoms
- Rest is important
- Eat smaller meals more often if eating large meals makes you feel sick
- It is best to avoid alcohol to help your liver recover.

---

**Any questions?**

If you would like further information about Hepatitis A, please contact Alfred Health Infection Prevention on (03) 9076 3139.

---

**Further information:**

Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Health Vic
www2.health.vic.gov.au

---

If you would like to provide feedback or request a copy in a different format, contact us at patient.info@alfred.org.au