

## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver, an organ in your body that helps with digestion, managing of nutrients, and removing harmful substances from the blood. Hepatitis can be caused by viruses, alcohol, chemicals, and certain medicines. Hepatitis A is just one type of virus that can cause hepatitis.

A doctor can diagnose hepatitis by evaluating the symptoms and testing a person's blood. Testing helps measure the severity of illness and sometimes can determine the type of hepatitis.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Symptoms may include:

- fatigue
- mild fever
- nausea
- vomiting
- loss of appetite
- abdominal pain
- dark colored urine
- light colored stools
- yellow eyes and/or skin (also called jaundice).

The illness can be mild or severe. Many infected people, especially young children, have no symptoms, but they still can spread the virus. Symptoms develop in 15-50 days, most often 28-30 days, after exposure to the virus.

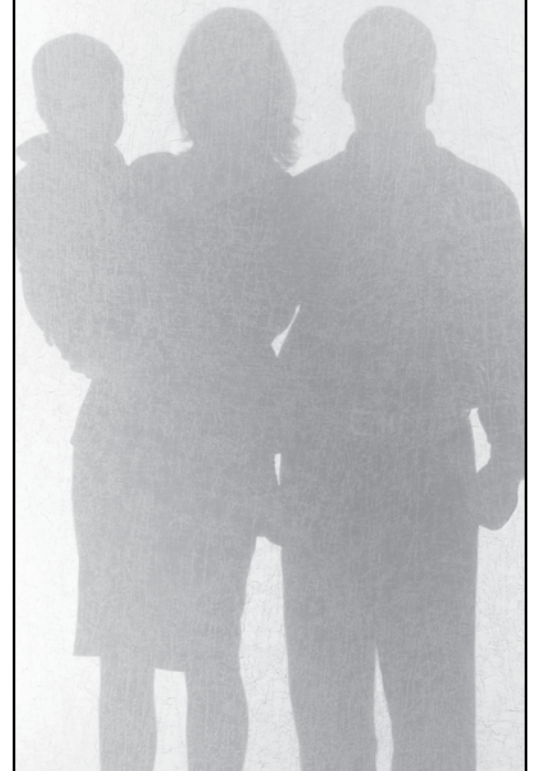
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# Hepatitis A



Orange County Health Care Agency  
Disease Control and Epidemiology

## How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of an infected person from about two (2) weeks before to one (1) week after the beginning of symptoms, especially the onset of yellow eyes or skin. Infection can occur after direct or indirect contact with the stool of an infected person.

This may happen when a person does not wash his or her hands after going to the toilet (and he/she is infected) or after changing diapers of an infected person, and then handles something that another person puts into his or her mouth, like food or toys.



It can also result from eating raw shellfish taken from water contaminated with sewage, something very unlikely to happen in the United States and other developed countries.



## Is there any treatment for hepatitis A?

There are no specific medicines for the treatment of hepatitis A. When you are ill, rest and a balanced, nutritious diet are recommended. The mild form of the illness usually lasts 1-2 weeks. Alcohol should be avoided during illness as it can further damage the liver.

Certain medicines should also be avoided while you have hepatitis – consult your doctor if you are on any medications.

## How can the spread of hepatitis A be prevented?

A vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis A infection and the two-dose regimen is now part of the routine childhood immunization schedule in the United States. See [www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/immunize](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/immunize) for more information.

The hepatitis A vaccine is also recommended for persons at increased risk for hepatitis A (for example, travelers to areas with high rates of hepatitis A, users of illicit drugs, or men who have sex with men). Use of the vaccine has made hepatitis A an uncommon infection in Orange County.



Within two weeks after exposure to hepatitis A, persons who have not had hepatitis A before and have not already received at least one dose of hepatitis A vaccine at least one month prior to exposure should receive either hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin to prevent infection, depending on their age and other underlying conditions. See [http://ochealthinfo.co\\_!bZelSTagflVUMb!Vb/](http://ochealthinfo.co_!bZelSTagflVUMb!Vb/) under Disease Information, then Hepatitis A.

The spread of hepatitis A can be prevented by washing hands well with soap and water after using the toilet and changing diapers, and before handling food, ice or beverages.



Young children must be taught to wash their hands and be supervised for good personal hygiene practices.

## Can I get hepatitis A again?

After having hepatitis A, you should develop immunity to the virus which protects you from a second attack. However, having immunity to hepatitis A will not protect you from the other types of viruses that cause hepatitis. Unlike in hepatitis B and C, there is no carrier state with hepatitis A, which means that the hepatitis A virus does not stay in the body after recovery.

## Hepatitis A and the health department

Hepatitis A is reportable to the health department. Since the health department is concerned with preventing spread of disease to the public, each case of hepatitis A is investigated to try to identify the possible source of exposure, provide education to prevent spread and make recommendations for the use of hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin to prevent infection in contacts.

Foodhandlers must not work until they are no longer infectious, that is, for at least one (1) week after the onset of the yellow eyes or skin. Other recommendations may be made to prevent outbreaks.