

Hepatitis A

April 2022

Hepatitis is a general term for an inflammation of the liver that can prevent the liver from functioning properly and result in illness. When it is caused by the hepatitis A virus, the illness is called hepatitis A. This is not the same as hepatitis B

What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms include flu-like symptoms and jaundice (yellowing of the skin) which gradually clear over time.
- Often hepatitis A does not cause any symptoms, particularly in children, who may be unaware that they have had the infection.
- Where symptoms occur, it usually starts with fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, sickness, stomach ache.
- After a few days jaundice (yellow colouring of the skin and whites of the eyes) may appear, urine may turn dark and bowel motions become pale.
- The period between becoming infected and developing symptoms is usually about 4 weeks but can vary from 2-6 weeks.

How does it spread?

- Infection occurs by eating food or drinking water contaminated with the virus.
- The virus is present in the stools of an infected person. If hands are not properly washed after using the toilet and before handling food, spread can occur from person to person.
- The illness can spread easily within families and where people live closely together.
- Fruit, vegetables and uncooked food washed in contaminated water can cause infection, especially in hot countries.
- Cooked food is safe, but can be contaminated if it has been handled by someone with the virus.
- A person is infectious (i.e. has virus in their stools) for approximately two weeks before the start of and for a week after the appearance of jaundice.

Can it be treated?

- There is no specific treatment. Depending on the severity of illness, bed rest and taking sufficient fluids may be required.
- The illness can last from one week to several weeks. Most people feel better within a few weeks, although they may feel tired and lack energy for many months. There is usually complete recovery after which a person has lifelong protection against this type of hepatitis

What action can we take to control or prevent it?

- Anyone suffering from hepatitis A should stay at home for a week after they develop jaundice and longer if they have not recovered from the illness.
- Good personal hygiene is important to prevent spread. Hands should be washed thoroughly after using the toilet, before preparing and serving food and after dealing with ill people.
- Toilets should be kept clean at all times.
- A person diagnosed as suffering from hepatitis A may be visited by an environmental health officer from the local council who will be able to advise on preventive measures.
- A vaccine injection may be given to close contacts within the family or institution to prevent spread. No vaccine is 100% effective. Good hygiene measures are important to prevent spread.
- Those who are travelling to a country where hepatitis A is common should ask their GP for the vaccine to protect themselves from the infection.

Sources of advice:

British Liver Trust <http://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk> 0800 652 7330

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hepatitis-a-guidance-data-and-analysis>

NHS 111 <http://www.nhs.uk/111> Call 111