

### What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.

### Who is at risk for hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A, but those at greater risk include:

- People who have not been immunized against hepatitis A.
- People traveling to countries where hepatitis A infection is common.
- People who are household members or caregivers of a person infected with hepatitis A.
- People who live with or have sex with people who have the disease.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Injection and non-injection drug users.
- People experiencing homelessness

### What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Adults and teens are more likely to have symptoms compared to children. Symptoms may include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, pale stools or jaundice (i.e., yellowing of skin or whites of eyes). Children younger than 6 often have few or no symptoms. Hepatitis A symptoms generally last less than two months. Prolonged or relapsing illness can last up to one year, but this is uncommon.

### How soon do symptoms appear?

It can take from 15 to 50 days to get sick after being exposed to the hepatitis A virus. The average is about a month.

### How is hepatitis A spread?

The hepatitis A virus is usually found in the stools (feces) of infected people. The virus is most likely to spread when people do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing a diaper or soiled sheets, then touch their own mouths, prepare food for others, or touch others with their contaminated hands. It can also be spread by eating or drinking food or water contaminated with the virus. The food and drinks most likely to be contaminated are fruits, vegetables, raw oyster, clams and other shellfish and untreated water or ice.

### When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

A person infected with hepatitis A is most likely to spread the disease during the two weeks before symptoms begin. Most people stop being contagious one week after their symptoms start. Young children can be shedding the virus in their stool for up to three months after infection. Unlike other hepatitis viruses, hepatitis A virus is usually not spread by blood.

### How is a person diagnosed?

A blood test looks for antibodies that fight the virus. This blood test can tell the difference between a current and past infection or previous vaccination.

### **What is the treatment?**

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person once the symptoms appear; the only treatment is supportive care.

### **Does past infection make a person immune?**

Once an individual recovers from hepatitis A, he or she is immune for life and does not continue to carry or spread the virus.

### **Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have Hepatitis A?**

Yes. Children and adults with the disease should be excluded for one week after onset of illness. A food handler should be excluded from work until one of the following conditions is met: a) The food handler has been jaundiced for more than seven days; b) The food handler has been symptomatic with symptoms other than jaundice for more than fourteen days; c) the food handler provides to the person in charge written medical documentation from a health practitioner stating that the food employee is free of a hepatitis A viral infection. Exclusion recommendations will be made by the North Dakota Department of Health.

### **What can be done to prevent the spread of hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A vaccine is currently available and routinely recommended for all children ages 12 to 23 months. Two doses of hepatitis A vaccine at least six months apart are needed to be fully protected. Hepatitis A vaccine is required for children, ages 12 through 23 months, attending early childhood facilities in North Dakota.

Additionally, hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for people ages 12 months and older traveling to or working in a high risk area, men who have sex with men, users of illegal drugs, people experiencing homelessness, previously unvaccinated people who anticipate having close personal contact with an international adoptee from a high risk area, people who have clotting disorders, people who may be exposed in a research laboratory setting and those with chronic liver disease. Any person who wishes to be immune to hepatitis A may also receive the vaccine.

Prevent the spread of hepatitis A with good hand washing after using the toilet or after diaper changing. Also, infected people should not handle or prepare food during the contagious period. Household members, child care contacts, or others in close contact with an infected person should call a health care provider to obtain hepatitis A vaccination or immune globulin, depending on age, which minimizes the chances of becoming ill.

### **Additional Information:**

Additional information is available at [www.ndhealth.gov/disease](http://www.ndhealth.gov/disease) or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

**This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.**

### **Resources:**

American Academy of Pediatrics. [Hepatitis A]. In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2018 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 31<sup>st</sup> ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2018:[pages 392 - 400].