

Hepatitis A

Public Health – Fact Sheet

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. People usually start to feel sick two to four weeks after being exposed to the virus but for some people, it can take up to two months for symptoms to appear. Some people, especially young children, may not feel sick at all.

Common symptoms can include:

- yellowing of the skin and eyes (this is called jaundice)
- fever
- loss of appetite
- feeling very tired
- nausea or vomiting
- stomach cramps and/or diarrhea
- dark pee
- pale-coloured feces (poop)

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Most people get better on their own in a few weeks to several months. Hepatitis A does not cause chronic (long-term) liver disease, but in rare cases, it can cause liver failure, which can be life-threatening. Severe disease is more common in adults and in those with other serious health conditions, such as people who already have liver disease.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A commonly spreads from person to person by fecal-oral route. Fecal-oral is when infected feces (poop) get into the mouth of another person. Hepatitis A spreads more easily in places with poor sewage systems or limited access to clean water for drinking and hand washing. It may also spread through blood, but this is less common. People with hepatitis A can spread the disease up to two weeks before they have symptoms, and until one week after symptoms start.

Hepatitis A can spread through:

Person-to-person contact

- living with or caring for someone with hepatitis A
- sexual contact with someone who is infected
- sharing needles or equipment used to prepare or inject drugs

Food or water

- eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated (has the virus in it)
- food can become contaminated when an infected person does not wash their hands properly after using the washroom and then prepares food
- food can also get contaminated while it is being grown, harvested or processed

If you think that you or your child may have hepatitis A, contact your health-care provider.

A blood test can show if you are infected.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

Handwashing: Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds after using the bathroom, changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. Soap and water is the best hand cleaning method to stop the spread of hepatitis A, but if they are not available, clean hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Frequently cleaning and disinfecting surfaces that are touched often: These surfaces include all bathrooms and kitchen surfaces and any surfaces that people frequently touch (e.g., tables, chairs, door knobs). Use a commercial cleaning and disinfecting solution that kills hepatitis A or bleach mixed with water. For bleach, use household chlorine bleach (5.25 per cent of sodium hypochlorite), mix 1 and $\frac{3}{4}$ cups bleach in 3.6 litres of water to make a 5000 parts per million (ppm) chlorine solution.

Safe food handling: Wash raw fruits and vegetables before eating. Wash your hands before and after preparing or eating food. Avoid preparing food for others if you are infected with hepatitis A.

Safer practices: Do not share needles or equipment for drug use. Follow safer sex practices such as using a condom during sexual activity.

Get vaccinated. The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective. It helps protect people who are at risk of getting hepatitis A, including those who have been in close contact to an infected person. The vaccine can prevent infection if given within two weeks after exposure. You may be eligible to receive the vaccine free of charge (see below).

Who should get a hepatitis A vaccine?

The hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for those six months and older who:

- live with or are in close contact with someone who has hepatitis A
- have certain medical conditions (e.g., kidney disease, liver disease including hepatitis B or C, HIV or weak immune systems)
- are travelling to an area or country where hepatitis A is common (Note: Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care does not cover the costs for hepatitis A vaccines related to international travel)
- are experiencing homelessness
- use drugs by smoking, snorting or injecting, or sharing equipment used for these activities (excludes drugs that are used as prescribed for therapeutic indications)
- are gay, bisexual or other men who have sex with men (gbMSM)

During outbreaks, the vaccine may also be offered to others who are at risk. For the most up-to-date vaccine eligibility, including outbreak eligibility, please visit: www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/vaccineeligibility.html.

For more information on hepatitis A disease or vaccine, you can:

- talk to your health-care provider or local [public health nurse](#)
- call Health Links–Info Santé at 204-788-8200 (in Winnipeg) or 1-888-315-9257 (toll-free)
- visit the Manitoba Public Health website on hepatitis A at: www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/diseases/hepatitisa.html