

Hepatitis A

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

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What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by hepatitis A virus.

How is hepatitis A virus (HAV) spread?

HAV is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. The virus spreads more easily in areas where sanitary conditions and personal hygiene practices are poor.

Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A. Casual contact, as in the usual office, factory, or school setting, does not spread the virus.

What are signs and symptoms of hepatitis A?

Persons with hepatitis A may not have any signs or symptoms of the disease. Older persons are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms are present, they usually occur suddenly and may include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal discomfort
- Dark urine
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

Symptoms usually last less than 2 months, but some persons are ill for as long as 6 months. Symptoms typically appear about 28 days after exposure to the virus, but can appear as soon as 15 days or as late as 50 days after exposure.

If you've had hepatitis A in the past, can you get it again?

No. After recovering from hepatitis A, you will never get it again and you cannot transmit the virus to others.

How do you know if you have hepatitis A?

A blood test is needed to diagnose hepatitis A. Talk to your healthcare provider if you think that you have been exposed to hepatitis A or any type of viral hepatitis.

How can you prevent hepatitis A?

Always wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing or eating food.

Two products are used to prevent hepatitis A virus infection:

- Hepatitis A vaccine can be given to persons 12 months of age and older. The vaccine is given to protect persons from getting hepatitis A before and after exposure to the virus. It is recommended for all children at 12 months of age and for persons who are more likely to get hepatitis A or get seriously ill if they get hepatitis A.
- Immune globulin can be given before exposure for short-term protection against hepatitis A and for persons who have already been exposed to HAV. *It must be given within 2 weeks after exposure to hepatitis A virus for maximum protection.*

Who should get vaccinated against hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for the following persons:

- All children at 12 months of age or before they enter school
- Persons traveling to countries that have high or intermediate rates of hepatitis A
- Men who have sex with men
- Users of street drugs (injecting and non-injecting)
- Persons who have occupational risk for infection (e.g. persons who work in a research laboratory setting)
- Persons who have chronic liver disease including hepatitis C or chronic hepatitis B
- Persons who are either awaiting or have received liver transplants
- Persons who have clotting-factor disorders
- Persons who have never had hepatitis A and who are given clotting-factor concentrates, especially solvent detergent-treated preparations
- All persons with hemophilia
- Anyone who wants to be protected

Can hepatitis A vaccine be given after exposure to hepatitis A virus?

- For healthy persons aged 12 months-40 years, single antigen hepatitis A vaccine at the age appropriate dose is preferred
- For persons aged >40 years, immune globulin is preferred; vaccine can be used if immune globulin cannot be obtained
- For children aged <12 months, immunocompromised persons, persons who have chronic liver disease diagnosed, and persons for whom vaccine is contraindicated, immune globulin should be used

How long does hepatitis A vaccine protect you?

Hepatitis A vaccine could be protective for at least 25 years in adults and at least 14-20 years in children.

How do you kill hepatitis A virus?

HAV can live outside the body for months, depending on the environmental conditions. It is killed by heating to 185 degrees F (85 degrees C) for one minute. However, HAV can still be spread from cooked food if the food gets contaminated after cooking. Adequate chlorination of water kills HAV that may get into the water supply.

Can I donate blood if I have had any type of viral hepatitis?

If you had any type of viral hepatitis since 11 years of age, you are not eligible to donate blood. Also, if you ever tested positive for hepatitis B or hepatitis C, at any age, you are not eligible to donate blood, even if you were never sick from the infection.

Hepatitis A in Maine

The Maine CDC immediately investigates reported cases of hepatitis A to identify sources of public health concern and to prevent further spread of the disease. For specific information on the number of Hepatitis A infections reported in Maine, please visit the Maine CDC website:

<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/newpubs.htm> and refer to the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Documents.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> – is another excellent source of health information.