

HEPATITIS A

WHAT IS HEPATITIS A?

Hepatitis A is an acute (short term) infection that affects the liver. Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The liver, located just under the right ribs helps the body to process food, drugs (both prescribed and recreational) and alcohol.

The different types of viruses that cause hepatitis are known by different letters: hepatitis A, B, C, D and E and are sometimes shortened to hep A, hep B and hep C etc.

HOW IS HEPATITIS A TRANSMITTED?

It is transmitted from person to person through the faecal - oral route. That is, it can be transmitted when a person's mouth comes into contact with faeces infected with the hepatitis A virus.

This may be through direct mouth to anal contact or through the ingestion of food or water that is infected with this virus. Hepatitis A often occurs in outbreaks, mainly due to contaminated food or water (especially in developing countries) however some outbreaks have recently occurred among men who have sex with men.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Many people who become infected with Hepatitis A do not experience any symptoms. People who become infected at an older age are more likely to experience symptoms compared to an individual who is infected at a younger age. If symptoms occur they usually only last for about a month and may include:

- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness
- Fever
- Dark urine
- Jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin)
- Right sided pain under the ribs

HOW CAN I PREVENT THIS INFECTION?

Vaccination for Hepatitis A is the best way to prevent infection and is recommended for the following people;

- Travellers to areas where there is widespread infection, this generally includes most developing countries.

- Men who have sex with men
- Injecting drug users
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children between 18 months and 6 years of age in north Queensland.
- Workers in remote Indigenous communities
- Child care workers
- Intellectually disabled people and their carers
- Health care workers
- Anyone who works with sewage
- People with liver disease.
- People with haemophilia

For more information regarding the Hepatitis A vaccine, please see your local doctor or community health centre.

Other methods to decrease the likelihood of infection include;

- Always washing hands with soap and water when preparing or handling food.
- Maintaining clean bathrooms and toilets
- Always boiling water that comes from an untreated source

HOW DO I TEST FOR HEPATITIS A?

A blood test can determine if you have been infected with Hepatitis A or vaccinated against the virus.

IS THERE ANY TREATMENT?

There is no specific treatment available for Hepatitis A; management is generally focused on support for the individual as there are no specific anti-viral medications available to decrease the severity or duration of the infection.

WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO HEPATITIS A INFECTION?

If you know that you have come into contact with the Hepatitis A virus and are not vaccinated it is important to see your local doctor immediately as there is treatment which may prevent you becoming infected with and experiencing the symptoms of hepatitis A.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE HELP?

- Your local Doctor will be able to help you with any concerns

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Hepatitis A. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.