

Hepatitis A

Also known as Hep A

Hepatitis A is an acute, self-limiting infection of the liver by an enterically transmitted virus, hepatitis A virus. Infection may be asymptomatic.

Causes

- Hepatitis A virus (HAV)
- Humans are the only known reservoir
- In the vast majority of cases, self-limiting illness occurs
- HAV does not cause chronic disease
- Very rarely progresses to acute fulminant hepatitis (less than 1% of cases)

Risk factors

Hepatitis A is spread via the faecal-oral route.- Risk factors include:

- Household transmission
- Sexual transmission
- Contact with contaminated food or water
- Blood transfusion
- IV drug use
- Travelling to endemic areas

Clinical presentation

The incubation period is on average 28 days (range 14-50).

Symptomatic illness occurs in over 70% of adults and includes nausea, anorexia, fever, lethargy and abdominal pain.-

After approximately 1-week jaundice begins to develop associated with dark urine and pale stools, and peaks at 2 weeks.-

Clinical signs include:

- jaundice
- scleral icterus
- hepatomegaly (80%)
- splenomegaly-
- right upper quadrant tenderness on palpation
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Diagnosis

- Patients with the above prodromal symptoms and jaundice and/ or elevated serum transaminases
- Serum IgM anti-HAV antibodies are detectable from symptom onset and remain detectable until approximately 6 months' post-infection
- Serum IgG HAV anti-bodies appear later in the course of disease, remain detectable for decades and confer lifelong immunity
- Imaging studies are generally not indicated

Management

- Treatment is supportive
- Hepatotoxic medications should be avoided
- Nearly all patients are completely recovered by 6 months

Prevention

Hepatitis A vaccination is the primary tool to protect against infection. The seroconversion rate following primary vaccination approaches 100% in healthy adults and children.

References

1. Lai M, Hepatitis A virus infection in adults: Epidemiology, clinical manifestations and diagnosis. UpToDate, September 2020. Accessed 28/10/20.
2. Chopra S, Hepatitis A virus infection: Treatment and prevention. UpToDate. September 2020. Accessed 28/10/20.

Disclaimer

We recognise that gender identity is fluid. In our treatment guidelines, the words and language we use to describe genitals and gender are based on the sex assigned at birth.

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