

# Hepatitis A

## What Is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a viral infection of the liver. The liver clears toxins from the body. This form of hepatitis causes the liver to become inflamed which can lead to even more issues and potentially liver failure.

## What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis A?

Not everyone has symptoms of a Hepatitis A infection. If symptoms develop, they usually appear two to six weeks after becoming infected and can include:

- Fever;
- Fatigue;
- Loss of appetite;
- Nausea/vomiting;
- Abdominal pain;
- Grey coloured stool; and
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and/or eyes).

## How Is Hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A can be found in unsafe drinking water that has not been properly sanitized. The Hepatitis A virus leaves the body in the stool of an infected person. The most common cause of Hepatitis A infection is from drinking or eating food that has come in contact with the feces of an infected Hepatitis A person. Eating raw or undercooked shellfish from contaminated waters have also been known to cause an infection.

## What Special Precautions Are Required for Hepatitis A? What Do I Need to Know?

Together we can take steps to stop the spread of Hepatitis A to other patients in the hospital:

- Everyone who enters or leaves your room will clean their hands – hand washing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of Hepatitis A;
- Your room and the equipment used in your room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly;
- Those who help you in the bathroom or provide care for you will wear gloves and wash their hands after removing their gloves; and
- Paediatric patients with a Hepatitis A infection:
  - Will stay in a room by themselves;
  - Everyone who cares for them or visits them will wear gloves and a long-sleeved gown; and
  - A sign for “Contact Precautions” will be placed on their door to remind everyone who enters the room about the special steps.

## What Is Good Hand Cleaning?

Our staff welcomes reminders to clean our hands. We invite you to ask anyone who enters your room to clean their hands before and after they touch you. Ask any staff member to show you good hand cleaning (20 seconds of soap and running water OR waterless alcohol hand rub for 20 seconds until hands are dry). Please clean your hands often and ask for help to clean your hands if needed:

- After using the bathroom;
- After blowing your nose;
- Before eating and drinking;
- Before and after you touch your dressing or wounds;
- When your hands are visibly dirty; and
- Before you leave your room.

## Who Is at Risk?

Vaccination is available to prevent becoming infected with Hepatitis A. Anyone who has not been vaccinated or previously infected can develop a Hepatitis A infection. In areas of the world where Hepatitis A is common, most infections occur during childhood. Some risk factors are:

- Poor sanitation;
- Lack of safe water;
- Use of injection drugs;
- Being a sexual partner of someone with an acute Hepatitis A infection; and
- Travel to the areas where the virus is widespread without immunization.

Due to a lack of readily available sanitation, underdeveloped countries, such as those in Central and South America as well as Asia have high yearly numbers of Hepatitis A infections.

## What Is the Treatment for Hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A. Care for someone with a Hepatitis A infection is comfort, good nutrition and preventing dehydration. The virus does not remain in the body after the infection is gone. Recovery from symptoms can vary. Most people recover within three months and nearly all of those infected will recover within six months. A Hepatitis A infection does not cause chronic liver disease and is rarely fatal, however Hepatitis A can cause crippling disease and liver failure.

Questions? Infection Prevention and Control department 519-464-4400 Ext. 5253.

### References:

Center for Disease Control: CDC Hepatitis A (July 2020)

WHO (World Health Organization) Hep A (July 2020)