



## Hepatitis A Facts

### What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by a virus. It lasts from a few weeks to a few months.

### How do you get hepatitis A?

The virus that causes hepatitis A enters through the mouth, grows in the body and is passed in the feces (bowel movement). You can get hepatitis A through:

- Person to person contact:
  - when an infected person does not wash their hands properly after going to the bathroom and touches other objects or food.
  - when a parent or caregiver does not properly wash their hands after changing diapers or cleaning up the stool of an infected person.
  - when someone engages in certain sexual activities, such as oral-anal contact with an infected person.
- Contaminated food or water:
  - Hepatitis A can be spread by eating or drinking food or water contaminated with the virus. This is more likely to occur in counties where hepatitis A is common and in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or poor personal hygiene. The food and drinks most likely to be contaminated are fruits, vegetables, shellfish, ice and water. In the United States, chlorine in our water kills any hepatitis A virus that enters the water supply.

### How can you tell if you have hepatitis A?

Symptoms of hepatitis A can vary from one person to another. They may include:

- Tiredness.
- Fever.
- Loss of appetite.
- Yellow eyes and skin (jaundice).
- Flu-like aches and chills.
- Dark urine.
- Nausea and stomach aches.
- Light-colored bowel movements.

Symptoms most commonly appear three to four weeks after you have been exposed to the virus, although they may appear as early as two weeks or as late as six weeks. Most people experience a mild illness lasting for one to two weeks. In a few cases, the disease may last for several months. Some people never show symptoms and do not know they are infected.

### How long can an infected person spread the virus?

A person can spread the virus as much as a week before showing any symptoms and will continue to spread the virus up to three to four days after the eyes or skin turn yellow.

### How is hepatitis A treated?

There are no special medicines you can take. Generally, bed rest is all that is recommended. Adults tend to develop more severe cases of the disease than children.

Shots can be given to prevent infection, but will not help unless given before or soon after contact. People who come in contact with an infected person or eat at a place where there has been an outbreak should call their health care provider or local health department immediately for more information.

### **Can you protect yourself from hepatitis A?**

Yes.

- The most effective way to prevent the disease is careful handwashing with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper or before preparing food. If you have been infected with hepatitis A, handwashing can reduce the risk of spreading it to others.
- There is also a vaccine against hepatitis A that is generally given as two shots six months apart.

### **Who can I call for more information?**

National STD Hotline: 1-800-227-8922

[www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)

Guilford County Department of Public Health

Greensboro or High Point: 336-641-7777

[www.myguilford.com](http://www.myguilford.com)