

HEPATITIS A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A causes inflammation that affects your liver's ability to function. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months.

Symptoms of Hepatitis A

Some people get Hepatitis A and have no symptoms of the disease. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children. If you do have symptoms, they may include the following:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (a yellowing of the skin or eyes)

If symptoms occur, they usually appear anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks after exposure. Symptoms usually develop over a period of several days.

How do People get Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is usually spread when a person ingests fecal matter — even in microscopic amounts — from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the feces or stool of an infected person.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Hepatitis A

A doctor can determine if you have Hepatitis A by discussing your symptoms and taking a blood sample.

There are no special treatments for Hepatitis A. Most people with Hepatitis A will feel sick for a few months before they begin to feel better. A few people will need to be hospitalized. During this time, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. People with Hepatitis A should check with a health professional before taking any prescription pills, supplements, or over-the-counter medications, which can potentially damage the liver. Alcohol should be avoided.

How Can I Help Prevent the Spread of Hepatitis A?

The best way to prevent Hepatitis A is through vaccination with the Hepatitis A vaccine. Vaccination is recommended for all children, for travelers to certain countries, and for people at high risk for infection with the virus. Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing food can help prevent the spread of Hepatitis A.



For more information, contact a Public Health Nurse at the City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or visit www.cchdmt.org or www.cdc.gov