



Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a viral infection of the liver. It is the most common form of hepatitis infection in the United States. Among reported cases, the most frequent source of infection is household or sexual contact with a person who has hepatitis A, followed by attending or working in childcare settings, recent international travel, or connection with suspected food or waterborne outbreaks.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Hepatitis A virus.

Symptoms

Usually starts suddenly with fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, and nausea. Dark (tea or cola-colored) urine, light-colored stools, and jaundice (yellowing of eyes or skin) may appear a few days later. Most children younger than 6 years of age (70%), do not show symptoms. Older children and adults with hepatitis A usually have symptoms, often including jaundice.

Spread

Hepatitis A virus leaves the body through the stool of an infected person or animal. The virus enters another person when hands, food, or objects (such as toys) contaminated with stool are placed in the mouth. Spread can also occur when people do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.

Children may pass the virus to household members or childcare staff without ever having symptoms.

Incubation

It takes from 15 to 50 days, usually about 28 days, from the time a person is exposed to the virus until symptoms begin.

Contagious period

From 2 weeks before to 2 weeks after symptoms begin. Minimal risk 1 week after the onset of jaundice.

Exclusion

Childcare and school

Consult with your local or state health department. Each situation must be looked at individually to decide if the person with hepatitis A can spread the virus to others.

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Diagnosis

A blood test (hepatitis A IgM antibody test) is done to determine whether there is recent or current infection.

Treatment

No specific medication is given to a person with hepatitis A.

Prevention

- Minnesota state law requires that all children 24 months of age or older enrolled in childcare or early childhood education programs be vaccinated against hepatitis A or have a legal exemption. Children should receive the first dose of hepatitis vaccine at 12 through 23 months of age. A second dose should be given at least 6 months after the first dose. Hepatitis A vaccine also is recommended for international travelers, men who have sex with men, persons who use illicit drugs, persons with occupational risks, and those with chronic liver disease.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food. Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Staff should closely monitor handwashing of all children after they have used the bathroom or have been diapered.
- Clean and disinfect diapering areas and potty chairs after each use and bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- If there is a case of hepatitis A in a childcare or school, consult with the local or state health department. They will determine who has been exposed and make recommendations.

For more information, call Hennepin County Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

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