

## What is Hepatitis E?

Hepatitis E is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis E virus. Hepatitis is the inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis E occurs most often in developing countries. Cases in Australia are most often associated with recent travel to endemic countries such as North Africa, the Middle East, and many parts of central and south-east Asia.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of hepatitis E infection can include:

- abdominal pain;
- loss of appetite and weight loss;
- nausea and vomiting;
- fever and chills;
- diarrhoea;
- yellow skin and eyes (jaundice);
- dark urine and pale faeces.

Symptoms usually start within 40 days of exposure to the virus, but this can range from 15-64 days. Most people recover after several days or weeks. It can be serious in pregnant women, especially during the third trimester and in those with pre-existing liver disease.

The infectious period is not known but the virus has been detected in faeces 2 weeks after the onset of jaundice.

## How is hepatitis E spread?

Hepatitis E is spread via the faecal-oral route. Most people get hepatitis E from:

- consuming contaminated food and water;
- zoonotic transmission (spread from infected animals)

## How is hepatitis E diagnosed and is there any treatment?

A diagnosis of hepatitis E is based on a blood test. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis E. Most people will clear their infection naturally. It is best to avoid alcohol while infected.

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Pregnant women, older people, those with weakened immune systems and people with chronic liver disease should consult with their doctor as their illness may be more severe.

## Vaccination

There is no vaccination against hepatitis E.

## How can hepatitis E be prevented?

Hepatitis E infection can be prevented by:

- washing hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, before preparing and eating food, and after handling soiled linen e.g. nappies;
- when travelling in regions with poor sanitation, drink bottled water and avoid food that may have been cleaned or prepared using contaminated water.

## How can the spread of infection be prevented from someone with hepatitis E?

People infected with hepatitis E, should wash their hands thoroughly, especially after going to the toilet and avoid the following activities:

- preparing food or drink for other people;
- providing health care for others.

## Need more information?

For more information about hepatitis E, contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on **(02) 6205 2155**.

**Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service** is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.

*Hepatitis E is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers.*

## **Acknowledgements**

1. CDC, *Hepatitis E, FAQs for Health Professionals*, 2015.
2. Heymann DL, *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 20<sup>th</sup> edition, 2015.
3. WHO Fact Sheet # 280, *Hepatitis E*, 2015.

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HPS-00-0239