

HEPATITIS A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a short-term viral infection of the liver. Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The liver is an organ which helps the body to process food, drugs and alcohol and is located under the ribs on the right side of the body. The different types of viruses that can cause hepatitis are known by different letters: hepatitis A, B, C, D and E.

How is hepatitis A transmitted?

Hepatitis A is transmitted from person to person through the faecal-oral route. That means it is transmitted when a person's mouth comes into contact with faeces (poo) from someone infected with the hepatitis A virus. This may be through direct mouth to anal contact or through ingesting food or water that is contaminated.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Many people infected with hepatitis A do not experience symptoms. It takes between 2-6 weeks for symptoms of hepatitis A to develop after coming into contact with the virus (the incubation period) with an average incubation period of 4 weeks.

Symptoms of hepatitis A include:

- fever
- weakness
- fatigue
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- joint aches and pains
- vomiting
- jaundice (yellowish eyes and skin, dark urine and pale coloured faeces)

The duration of the illness varies but most people start to feel better 1 month after the onset of symptoms.

Does hepatitis A cause any complications?

Hepatitis A infection does not cause long term infection, but can contribute to liver problems in those with pre-existing liver damage due to hepatitis B or C and other liver disease.

How is hepatitis A diagnosed?

Testing for hepatitis A is done via a blood test. This blood test can determine if you have been infected with hepatitis A or vaccinated against the virus.

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

A vaccine is available to protect against hepatitis A infection and is recommended for the following groups of people:

- men who have sex with men
- injecting drug users
- sex industry workers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children residing in the NT, QLD, SA and WA
- travellers to hepatitis A endemic areas
- people with an occupational risk (eg plumbers/ healthcare workers)
- people with developmental disabilities
- people with chronic liver disease, liver transplant recipients, and those living with hepatitis B or C

To avoid the transmission of hepatitis A:

- always wash hands thoroughly after going to the toilet, before preparing and eating food and after handling soiled linen
- avoid sharing food, cutlery, crockery, cigarettes and drinks with other people
- when travelling in areas with poor sanitation, drink bottled water and choose foods carefully
- consider vaccination

CANBERRA SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE

Is there any treatment for hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment available for hepatitis A. Hepatitis A is not a life threatening infection except when it is acquired in somebody who already has liver disease.

What if I have been exposed to hepatitis A infection?

If you know that you have come into contact with the hepatitis A virus and are not vaccinated see your local doctor as soon as possible, as there is a treatment which may prevent you becoming infected with hepatitis A.

Where can I get tested and treated for hepatitis A in Canberra?

Canberra Sexual Health Centre

Building 5, Level 1, North Wing
Yamba Drive Garran
Ph: (02) 6244 2184

Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT

Level 1, 28 University Avenue
Canberra ACT 2601
Ph: (02) 6247 3077

General Practitioners (GPs) in Canberra

<http://health.act.gov.au/health-services/find-a-health-service>

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service

63 Boolimba Crescent
Narrabundah ACT 2604
Phone: (02) 6284 6222
Free call: 1800 110 290 or 1800 120 859

Useful websites

www.hepatitisresourcecentre.com.au

www.hepatitisaustralia.com

To access information about hepatitis A in other languages:

http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/PresentDetail?Open&s=Hepatitis_A:_The_facts

References:

Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council (2013). *The Australian immunisation handbook (10th Ed)*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Hepatitis Australia (2013) Hepatitis A. Accessed <http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com/>

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (2012). Hepatitis A Factsheet. Accessed http://www.mshc.org.au/portals/_default/uploads/fact_sheets/hepA_a4.pdf

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with general information only. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with a health practitioner. All clients are advised to enquire about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been made to ensure that this information is correct at the time of publishing.