

What I need to know about Hepatitis A



NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH
National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse



U.S. Department
of Health and
Human Services

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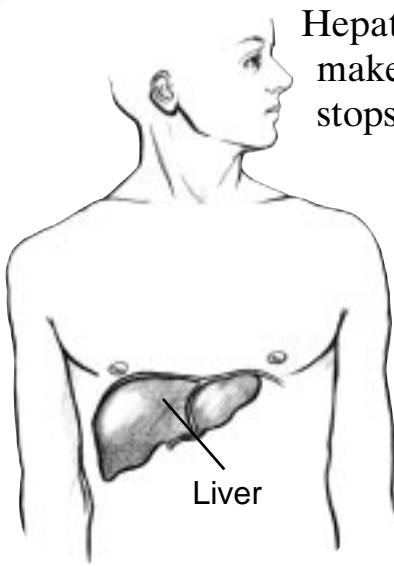
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What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a liver disease.



Hepatitis (HEP-ah-TY-tis) makes your liver swell and stops it from working right.

You need a healthy liver. The liver does many things to keep you alive. The liver fights infections and stops bleeding. It removes drugs and other poisons from your blood. The liver also stores energy for when you need it.

What causes hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus.

A virus is a germ that causes sickness. (For example, the flu is caused by a virus.) People can pass viruses to each other. The virus that causes hepatitis A is called the hepatitis A virus.

How could I get hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is spread by close personal contact with someone else who has the infection.

You could get hepatitis A by

- eating food that has been prepared by someone with hepatitis A
- drinking water that has been contaminated by hepatitis A (in parts of the world with poor hygiene and sanitary conditions)



Wash your hands before fixing or eating food.

Who can get hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A.

But some people are more likely to than others:

- people who live with someone who has hepatitis A
- children who go to day care
- people who work in a day care center
- men who have sex with men
- people who travel to other countries where hepatitis A is common



Children in day care could get hepatitis A.

What are the symptoms?

Hepatitis A can make you feel like you have the flu.

You might

- feel tired
- feel sick to your stomach
- have a fever
- not want to eat
- have stomach pain
- have diarrhea

Some people have

- dark yellow urine
- light-colored stools
- yellowish eyes and skin

Some people don't have any symptoms.

If you have symptoms or think you might have hepatitis A, go to a doctor. The doctor will test your blood.

How is hepatitis A treated?

Most people who have hepatitis A get well on their own after a few weeks.

You may need to rest in bed for several days or weeks, and you won't be able to drink alcohol until you are well. The doctor may give you medicine for your symptoms.



Bed rest and medicine will help you get better.

How can I protect myself?

You can get the hepatitis A vaccine.

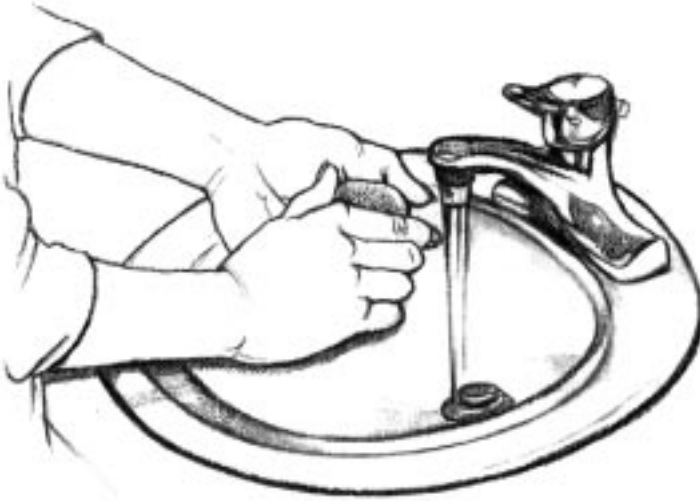
A vaccine is a drug that you take when you are healthy that keeps you from getting sick. Vaccines teach your body to attack certain viruses, like the hepatitis A virus.

The hepatitis A vaccine is given through a shot. Children can get the vaccine after they turn 2 years old. Children aged 2 to 18 will need three shots. The shots are spread out over a year. Adults get two or three shots over 6 to 12 months.

You need **all** of the shots to be protected. If you are traveling to other countries, make sure you get all the shots before you go. If you miss a shot, call your doctor or clinic right away to set up a new appointment.



Vaccines protect you from getting hepatitis A.



Wash your hands to protect yourself.

You can protect yourself and others from hepatitis A in these ways, too:

- Always wash your hands after using the toilet and before fixing food or eating.
- Wear gloves if you have to touch other people's stool. Wash your hands afterward.
- Drink bottled water when you are in another country. (And don't use ice cubes or wash fruits and vegetables in tap water.)

For More Information

You can also get information about hepatitis A from these groups:

American Liver Foundation (ALF)

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 603

New York, NY 10038-4810

Phone: 1-800-GO-LIVER (465-4837),

1-888-4HEP-USA (443-7872),

or (212) 668-1000

Fax: (212) 483-8179

Email: info@liverfoundation.org

Internet: www.liverfoundation.org

Hepatitis Foundation International (HFI)

504 Blick Drive

Silver Spring, MD 20904-2901

Phone: 1-800-891-0707 or (301) 622-4200

Fax: (301) 622-4702

Email: hfi@comcast.net

Internet: www.hepfi.org

More in the Series

There are other types of hepatitis. The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse also has booklets about hepatitis B and hepatitis C:

- *What I need to know about Hepatitis B*
- *What I need to know about Hepatitis C*

You can get a free copy of each of these booklets by calling 1-800-891-5389 or (301) 654-3810, or by writing to

NDDIC
2 Information Way
Bethesda, MD 20892-3570

Hepatitis information for health professionals is also available.



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Internet: www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov

The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). The NIDDK is part of the National Institutes of Health under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Established in 1980, the clearinghouse provides information about digestive diseases to people with digestive disorders and to their families, health care professionals, and the public. NDDIC answers inquiries, develops and distributes publications, and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about digestive diseases.

Publications produced by the clearinghouse are carefully reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts.

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