

# Food Safety Fact Sheet

## Foodborne Illness: Hepatitis A

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### What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus transmitted by the fecal-oral route. This means that you must get something in your mouth that is contaminated with stool from an infected person.

### Who gets Hepatitis A?

Most infections result from contact with a household member or sexual partner who has hepatitis A. Sometimes infection results from consuming food or drink that is contaminated with the hepatitis A virus. Once a person recovers from hepatitis A, the person is immune for life and is no longer contagious.

### How soon after exposure do hepatitis A symptoms appear?

On average, symptoms appear 1 month after exposure and may include vomiting, diarrhea and jaundice (whites of the eyes and skin become yellowish). The contagious period lasts from 2 weeks before to 1 week after the jaundice starts.

It is important to seek medical care as soon as hepatitis A symptoms appear. Since there are several types of hepatitis, a blood test is needed to determine which type is present. Infected children should stay home from school and daycare for 10 days following the onset of illness.

Things other than hepatitis can cause diarrhea and vomiting. Adults with moderate to severe gastrointestinal symptoms, particularly diarrhea lasting more than 4 days, should have a stool culture done through a physician or local health department.

### What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

Rest and a balanced diet are usually all that are needed. There is no medication to treat hepatitis A.

### How can hepatitis A be prevented?

Hand washing with soap after going to the bathroom or diapering is one effective way to prevent the spread of hepatitis A. Gamma globulin (IG) can help prevent infection and is recommended for people who live in the same house as a person with hepatitis A. It also can be given to sexual contacts of a person with hepatitis A and to other children in the same daycare center with a child with hepatitis A. IG is not given to casual contacts of a person with hepatitis A, such as friends and coworkers, because the risk of infection in these situations is extremely small.

Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for travelers to countries where hepatitis A is a common infection and for high-risk adults in this country. Hepatitis A vaccine protects the person who receives it after about a month from the date it is administered. It is not useful for people who have already been exposed to the virus.