

**What is hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by hepatitis A virus.

**What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis A?**

Persons with hepatitis A virus infection might not have any signs or symptoms of the disease. Older persons are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms are present, they usually occur abruptly and can include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Symptoms usually last less than 2 months; a few persons are ill for as long as 6 months. The average incubation period for hepatitis A is 28 days (range: 15-50 days).

**How is hepatitis A diagnosed?**

A blood test (IgM anti-HAV) is needed to diagnose hepatitis A. Talk to your doctor or someone from your local health department if you suspect that you have been exposed to hepatitis A or any type of viral hepatitis.

**How is hepatitis A virus transmitted?**

Hepatitis A virus is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. This type of transmission is called "fecal-oral." For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where good personal hygiene is not observed.

Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A. Casual contact, as in the usual office, factory, or school setting, does not spread the virus.

**What products are available to prevent hepatitis A virus infection?**

Two products are used to prevent hepatitis A virus infection: immune globulin and hepatitis A vaccine.

1. Immune globulin is a preparation of antibodies that can be given before exposure for short-term protection against hepatitis A and for persons who have already been exposed to hepatitis A virus. Immune globulin must be given within 2 weeks after exposure to hepatitis A virus for maximum protection.
2. Hepatitis A vaccine has been licensed in the United States for use in persons 2 years of age and older. The vaccine is recommended (before exposure to hepatitis A virus) for persons who are more likely to get hepatitis A virus infection or are more likely to get seriously ill if they do get hepatitis A. The vaccines currently licensed in the United States are HAVRIX(7) (manufactured by SmithKline Beecham Biologicals) and VAQTA(7) (manufactured by Merck & Co., Inc).