

ALLEGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Office Administration

(269) 673-5411

Bioterrorism Preparedness

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Personal Health

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Communicable Disease

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Environmental Health

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Resource Recovery

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Hepatitis A

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious, highly contagious liver disease that results from infection with the hepatitis A virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis A is usually spread by the fecal-oral route, when a person ingests feces (poop)-even in microscopic amounts - from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by feces from an infected person. Most infections result from contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A. Sometimes infection results from eating food or drink that is contaminated with the virus.

What are the symptoms?

Not everyone has symptoms. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 15 to 50 days after a person becomes infected and can include: fever, feeling tired, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, pale colored feces, dark urine, joint pain, and/or yellowing of skin and eyes (jaundice). Symptoms are more likely to occur in adults than in children.

How is Hepatitis A treated?

To treat hepatitis A, health care providers usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and monitoring. Some people will need to be hospitalized. Most people who get hepatitis A feel sick for several months, but usually recover and do not have lasting liver damage. If you have been exposed to the hepatitis A virus, hepatitis A vaccine and/or immune globulin should be given as soon as possible. If you think you have been exposed, call your health care provider immediately. If you are a food-service worker or a day-care worker: report your illness to your supervisor and do not work until your illness is over and your health care provider says it is OK to return to work.

People at Risk

Although anyone can get hepatitis A (HAV), some people are at a greater risk, such as those who:

- Are homeless or transient
- Are in jail
- Use injection and non-injection illegal drugs
- Work with the high-risk populations listed above
- Have close contact, care for, or live with someone who has HAV
- Men who have sex with men
- Travel to countries with high or medium rates of HAV
- Have chronic liver disease, such as cirrhosis, hepatitis B or hepatitis C (these people may not be at an increased risk of getting HAV infections, but are at increased risk of having poor outcomes if they are infected with HAV).
- Persons with clotting factor disorders

Other Important Information/Prevention Information

Food safety, immunization, proper hand washing, and improved sanitation are the most effective ways to combat hepatitis A. The spread of hepatitis A can be reduced by:

- Getting vaccinated against hepatitis A (a two-dose series of hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for all children 12-24 months of age). Vaccine is available for long-term protections against hepatitis A for children and adults.

- Washing hands after using restroom and before eating or preparing meals
- Not sharing towels, toothbrushes, food, drinks, drugs, or smokes with others
- Seeking medical care if hepatitis A is suspected
- Cooperating with local public health if diagnosed with hepatitis A to prevent further spread of the virus.

More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis and www.michigan.gov/mdhhs

This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Parents should contact their healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child's health. If you have general questions, you may contact an Allegan County Public Health Nurse at 269-673-5411.