

## Hepatitis A Information Sheet

### What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a serious and contagious liver disease caused by a virus. The disease can range from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months. Hepatitis A is not a lifelong infection like other types of hepatitis can be.

### How can you catch Hepatitis A?

People usually get sick with hepatitis A by putting something in their mouth that has touched the feces (poop) of an infected person such as foods, drinks, contaminated objects, or sexual contact. It can also be transmitted by eating raw or undercooked shellfish (oysters, clams, mollusks, etc.), drinking contaminated water, or through illegal drug use (whether the drugs are injected or not).

### What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

Symptoms of hepatitis A infections usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after contact with the virus and may include:

- Abdominal pain
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Tiredness
- Dark urine
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Light or grey colored stools
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)

An infected person is most contagious about two weeks before symptoms appear until about one week after jaundice appears. Young children rarely show severe symptoms, but can still spread the virus.

**Children with this infection should NOT attend school or daycare until symptoms have stopped!**

**People with this infection should NOT work as food handlers, healthcare providers or childcare workers until symptoms have stopped!**

### How can you be treated for Hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. It is usually recommended to maintain good nutrition, get plenty of rest, drink fluids, avoid alcohol and certain medications that affect the liver, such as acetaminophen, and regularly see your healthcare provider. People generally feel sick for a few months. Once a person recovers from their infection, they cannot become infected with hepatitis A virus again.

### How can you prevent Hepatitis A?

**The best way to prevent hepatitis A is by getting a vaccine series of 2 shots, 6 months apart.** People who experience homelessness or unsteady housing or use drugs are particularly at risk for this infection and should get vaccinated. Other ways to prevent infection include:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially before eating or preparing food or drinks and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- Avoid raw or undercooked shellfish.
- Only drink safe, treated water. Do not swallow water in pools, lakes, rivers, etc.
- Do not swim when you have diarrhea.
- Practice safe food handling: wash all fruits and vegetables, cook meats well, and keep raw meats and their juices away from other food.
- Use extra caution when traveling to developing countries: "Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it!"
- Household contacts of someone with Hepatitis A should receive an injection from their healthcare provider within 2 weeks to prevent the illness, if they have never been vaccinated for Hepatitis A or had the infection previously.