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Hepatitis A

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an illness of the liver caused by infection with the Hepatitis A virus.

Who can get sick from Hepatitis A?

Anyone who has not already had Hepatitis A illness or has not received the Hepatitis A vaccine can get Hepatitis A. Those at the greatest risk are international travelers to developing countries where Hepatitis A is common.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

A person becomes infected with Hepatitis A by swallowing the virus. This can occur when an individual eats food or drinks water contaminated with Hepatitis A virus, or has direct contact with an infected person who has poor personal hygiene.

Food can become contaminated by being handled or prepared by an infected individual who has poor personal hygiene. Shellfish, such as clams and oysters, may be contaminated if they have been harvested from waters that have been contaminated by sewage containing Hepatitis A virus.

What are the symptoms?

An individual infected with Hepatitis A may have no symptoms, or may have a range of symptoms including fatigue, poor appetite, fever and vomiting. The urine may become darker in color and the skin and the white part of the eye may become jaundiced (yellow in color). Infants and young children tend to have no symptoms or very mild symptoms and are less likely to develop jaundice than older individuals. Most individuals recover fully within a few weeks.

How soon do the symptoms start?

Symptoms of Hepatitis A usually appear within 3 to 4 weeks after swallowing the virus, but may appear as quickly as 2 weeks or take as long as 2 months.

How is Hepatitis A diagnosed?

Hepatitis A is diagnosed by a blood test for Hepatitis A antibodies.

How is Hepatitis A treated?

No specific medication or antibiotic is required for Hepatitis A. Most people recover on their own within a few weeks.



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How long is the infected person able to pass this infection to another person?

An infected person is capable of transmitting Hepatitis A to others as long as the Hepatitis A virus is being passed in his/her stool. This usually lasts no longer than 1 week after jaundice or symptoms, if there is no jaundice, is recognized. There is no carrier state.

Is there a vaccine for Hepatitis A?

Yes, there is a vaccine for Hepatitis A. The vaccine is available to all people, but it is especially recommended for people subject to unusual exposure to Hepatitis A. This includes laboratory personnel who work with the Hepatitis A virus, travelers to countries with high rates of Hepatitis A, people living in communities with high rates of Hepatitis A, people with existing chronic liver disease, sexually active homosexual/bisexual men, and drug users using needles.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Generally, individuals infected with Hepatitis A may return to work or school when their symptoms have resolved, but they must be sure to carefully wash their hands after using the bathroom.

What can a person do to prevent this Hepatitis A?

- Carefully wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet, before preparing food and beverages, and before eating.
- Make certain that all human wastes are discarded in a sanitary manner.
- Avoid drinking untreated water.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked shellfish.
- Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A.

Where can I get more information on Hepatitis A?

New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services:

http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/f_hepaa.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/Hepatitis/HepatitisA.htm>