



# Hepatitis A

- **Hepatitis A, also called 'hep A' is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver.**
- **The hep A virus is found in the faeces (poo) of people with the infection and usually spread by close personal contact (including sexual contact).**
- **Deaths from hepatitis A are rare, but some people get very sick.**

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by viruses such as hepatitis A, B, C, D, E and G, alcohol, some chemicals, or drugs.

Hepatitis A is a different virus to [hepatitis B](#) and [hepatitis C](#).

## How do you get it?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the faeces (poo) of people with the infection. It's usually spread by close personal contact with an infected person (including sexual contact), or by eating or drinking contaminated (dirty) food or water.

## Who is most at risk?

You are most at risk of hepatitis A if:

- you live with someone who has hepatitis A
- you do not practice good hygiene, especially hand washing
- you work in a job where you may be exposed to the virus, including child care and sewage workers
- you travel to other countries where hepatitis A is common
- you practice oral-anal sex.

Young children have very close contact with each other, so it's easy for the virus to spread between children, particularly if they're still in nappies.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear about 4 weeks after infection. Common symptoms include:

- tiredness
- body aches and pains
- loss of appetite
- nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting
- fever and chills
- upper stomach pain, usually on the right side
- eyes or skin turning yellow (jaundice).
- Young children often have no symptoms, but most older children and adults do.

## How do I know if I have it?

Diagnosis is based on your symptoms and confirmed by a blood test showing IgM antibodies to hepatitis A.

If you suspect you or your child has hepatitis A, see your doctor as soon as possible.

## How is it treated?

Talk to your doctor. There is no special treatment for hepatitis A. Most people get well on their own after a few months, but a few older children and adults may need to go to hospital. Lots of rest and a good diet help. You can only get hepatitis A once.



## While you have the disease

People who must not go to work at least 1 week after jaundice develops include:

- people who handle food or drink professionally
- child care or healthcare workers
- swimming instructors.

Check with your doctor.

If you have hepatitis A, don't prepare or handle other people's food.

## How can it be prevented?

If you have had close contact with an infected person, see your doctor as soon as possible, as there are ways to stop or lessen the infection.

### Hand washing and hygiene

Always wash your hands (use soap, and rub hands together really well for 15 seconds):

- after going to the toilet
- after changing nappies
- before eating
- before preparing food.

The hepatitis A virus can survive in damp places for weeks. If you or a family member has hepatitis A, you need to clean all surfaces which could have the virus on it for at least 1 week after jaundice develops. This includes door handles, toilet seats and handles, taps and nappy change tables.

### Safer sex

Use dams (a thin latex square held over the vaginal or anal area during oral sex) to prevent spreading hepatitis A during oral-anal sex. You can get them from sexual health clinics and some chemists.

## Overseas travel

If you are travelling to places where hepatitis A is common (including most developing countries), take special care to avoid infections. Be very careful when you choose or prepare food and drink. 'Cook it, peel it, boil it or forget it' is good advice. See your doctor and discuss your travel plans at least 6 weeks in advance.

## Is there a vaccine for hepatitis A?

Yes. You need 2 vaccinations for best protection. There is also a combined hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine.

## Who should be vaccinated?

Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for:

- Aboriginal children in Western Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia
- people travelling to places where hepatitis A is common (includes most developing countries)
- people living or working in remote Aboriginal communities
- staff in child care centres
- sewage workers
- sex workers
- people with an intellectual disability and their carers
- men who have sex with men
- people who inject drugs
- people with chronic liver disease.

Talk to your doctor if you are thinking about hepatitis A vaccination.



## Translated information

**Disclaimer:** Information in the following multilingual fact sheets differ slightly from the information above. These fact sheets are currently being reviewed and will be updated soon.

- [Arabic – hepatitis A \(PDF 182KB\)](#)
- [Burmese – hepatitis A \(PDF 128KB\)](#)
- [Chinese – hepatitis A \(PDF 294KB\)](#)
- [French – hepatitis A \(PDF 96KB\)](#)
- [Indonesian – hepatitis A \(PDF 215KB\)](#)
- [Thai – hepatitis A \(PDF 184KB\)](#)
- [Vietnamese – hepatitis A \(PDF 283KB\)](#)

## Remember

- Hepatitis A is a disease of the liver.
- It is spread by a virus.
- Hepatitis A is different to hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- A vaccination against hepatitis A is available.

## Related sites

- [Hepatitis WA](#)
- [Food Standards Australia New Zealand](#)
- [Hepatitis Australia](#)
- [healthdirect](#)

## Where to get help

- See your doctor
- Ring *healthdirect* on 1800 022 222
- Sexual Health Helpline (08) 9227 6178 or 1800 198 205 (toll free)
- Metropolitan Communicable Disease Control (08) 9222 8588
- Regional population health units (business hours)

Those in bold provide clinical services:

- Albany (08) 9842 7500
- Broome (08) 9194 1630
- Bunbury (08) 9781 2350
- Carnarvon (08) 9941 0506
- **Geraldton (08) 9956 1985**
- Kalgoorlie – Boulder (08) 9080 8200
- Northam (08) 9690 1720
- **South Hedland (08) 9174 1660**

[View the full contact details for population health units.](#)

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