

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A, formerly known as "infectious hepatitis," is an infection of a person's liver that is caused by a virus. Approximately 20,000 cases of hepatitis A are reported each year in the United States. In various communities, 15-40% of reported hepatitis A cases are associated with spread within child care centers.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

The illness usually produces a sudden fever, nausea, vomiting, a general tired or weak feeling, dark-colored urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes). These symptoms begin about 2-6 weeks after contact with the virus. School-age children and adults will usually become ill, **but many children less than 3 years of age may have no symptoms**. An adult who develops hepatitis A may be ill long enough to miss about one month of work. Most people recover completely.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

Persons become infected by getting hepatitis A virus into their mouths. The virus is found in the stool (bowel movement or feces) of an infected person for about 2 weeks before becoming ill and for 1 week after symptoms develop. **Infected children who have no symptoms are as able to spread hepatitis A as infected children who are ill**. In child care centers, the virus can spread by direct contact with infected children, during diaper changing, or by playing with stool-contaminated objects (toys, etc.).

How is Hepatitis A diagnosed?

The diagnosis of hepatitis A is made by a doctor based on the person's symptoms and on blood tests. An infected person with no symptoms will still show signs of hepatitis A infection in the person's blood.

What can prevent illness if a person is exposed to Hepatitis A?

Post exposure prophylaxis can be given to reduce the risk of coming down with disease. This is a shot that is given to prevent hepatitis A. It is most effective if given within 2 weeks after contact with a person who has hepatitis A.

What should be done when a child care center has Hepatitis A?

Since fewer than one in ten infected diaper-aged children have symptoms, outbreaks in child care centers commonly are not recognized until workers and parents begin getting ill. If hepatitis is found in a child care center, the center should not close and parents should be discouraged from transferring their children to other centers. Transferring children only serves to spread the illness to other centers.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

Increasing good hygiene practices in staff, parents and children can successfully stop the spread of hepatitis. Prevention measures include the following:

1. Wash hands carefully with soap, warm water, and friction for at least 15 seconds after changing any diapers or handling stool-soiled material from any persons.
2. Wash hands carefully with soap, warm water, and rubbing together for at least 15 seconds after each bowel movement.
3. Make soap easily accessible to all employees and children.
4. Ensure that all children wash hands with warm running water and soap and dry hands with disposable towels after each trip to the bathroom.
5. Dispose of soiled paper diapers and place stool-soiled cloth diapers in a bag that seals tightly for return to parent.

6. Change diapers on a changing table with an impermeable surface. Clean the changing table with an appropriate solution (a 1:100 dilution, or one-quarter cup of bleach per gallon of water, prepared daily and dispensed in a spray bottle). Spray the surface with this solution after each diaper change and wipe with a disposable towel. Diapering should not take place on any play tables or tables on which food is prepared or children eat.
7. Separate food preparation and feeding duties strictly from diaper-changing and toilet cleaning responsibilities.
8. Wash toys at least daily with a bleach solution.
9. Wash any stool-soiled items (floor, beds, toys, etc.) immediately.
10. Disinfect accessory items (such as containers of baby powder or jars of Vaseline) daily as they can accidentally be soiled during a diaper-change.
11. Ensure all children wash their hands with warm running water and soap before meals or snacks.
- 12. Wash hands carefully before preparing or handling any food. This step is especially important.**

IF YOU BECOME AWARE OF A POSSIBLE CASE OF HEPATITIS IN A CHILD, FAMILY MEMBER, OR WORKER IN THE CHILD CARE CENTER, YOU SHOULD IMMEDIATELY NOTIFY THE _____ LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT AT PHONE _____