

**What is Hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A, formerly known as infectious hepatitis, is an infection of a person's liver, which 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 skin and whites of 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 do you get Hepatitis A?**

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 two weeks before becoming ill and for 1-2 weeks after jaundice develops. Infected children who have no symptoms are as able to spread hepatitis A as infected children who are ill. The virus can be spread by direct contact with infected children, during diaper-changing, or by playing with stool-contaminated toys and other objects.

**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 the 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 within 14 days of exposure. This is a shot that is given to prevent hepatitis. This will reduce the risk of coming down with the illness if given within 2 weeks after the last contact with a person who has hepatitis A.

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

Since fewer than 1 in 10 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 helps spread the disease 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:

- 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.
- 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.
- Ensure that all children wash hands with warm running water and soap and dry hands with disposable towels after each trip to the bathroom.
- Dispose of soiled paper diapers and place stool-soiled cloth diapers in plastic bag that seals tightly to return to parent for laundering.
- 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.

- Separate food preparation and feeding duties strictly from diaper-changing and toilet cleaning responsibilities.
- Wash toys at least daily with a bleach solution.
- Disinfect accessory items (such as containers of baby powder or jars of Vaseline) daily as they can accidentally be soiled during a diaper-change.
- Wash any stool-soiled items (floor, beds, toys, etc.) immediately.
- Ensure all children wash their hands with warm running water and soap before meals or snacks.
- **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**

**\_\_\_\_\_ Health Department at (    )\_\_\_\_\_**