

HEPATITIS A

What Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a disease of the liver caused by a virus. This virus is found worldwide including New Brunswick. Developing countries have the highest prevalence of Hepatitis A. The virus is usually passed in the feces of infected persons, and can also be found in blood.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear about one month after a person is infected. Some people do not have any symptoms. Others may have fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain, dark urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyeballs). Symptoms usually last less than two months. Some persons can be ill for as long as six months.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is passed in the feces of infected persons and can be found in water and soil contaminated with sewage. Infected food handlers with poor personal hygiene and traces of feces on their hands may contaminate food, including ready to eat food and food handled after cooking. Surfaces can also be contaminated. Shellfish harvested in contaminated waters have also been associated with outbreaks.

The disease is also spread by close personal contact with infected persons with poor personal hygiene. For example, infants and young children in diapers may easily pass it to others. Cases have been associated with illegal intravenous drug use and blood borne spread.

How is Hepatitis A diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on clinical symptoms and laboratory testing.

Who is at risk of Hepatitis A infection?

Travellers to endemic countries risk exposure via food and water. Intravenous drug users are at an increased risk of exposure.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

Immunize. A vaccine for Hepatitis A is available. For additional information contact your health-care provider, including before travelling to countries where Hepatitis A occurs.

Use good environmental management. Flush or discard any stool in the toilet and clean surrounding area using hot water and detergent. A chlorine-based disinfectant is recommended.

Practice good personal hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet or changing a diaper, after handling animals or contact with animal feces, and before preparing or eating food. Make sure children wash their hands and caregivers hands are washed after changing diapers.

Take food safety precautions. Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Thoroughly cook all meats. Prevent contact of cooked foods with raw meat. Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese, and yogurt).

Drink properly treated water. Avoid swallowing recreational waters from swimming pools. Do not drink untreated surface water from lakes or streams. Test private well drinking water regularly (once or twice per year).

Practice safe sex and properly use condoms for vaginal, anal and oral sex.

Lower your risk of blood-borne infections and never share drug use equipment such as needles and syringes with other partners.

How is Hepatitis A treated?

Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms. Consult your health-care provider for advice and treatment if you symptoms; prescription medicines may be used.

What is the Public Health response?

Health-care provider, hospitals and laboratories, schools and childcare centres are required to notify cases to Public Health. Public Health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who may be at risk of infection, provide advice as necessary, and implement control measures; including exclusion of infected workers in high risk occupations like persons involved in food handling, direct patient care, and care of the young (daycare) or the elderly (institutional settings).

Further Information

Please contact your health-care provider, local Public Health office or Tele-Care 811.