

# Hepatitis A – including symptoms, treatment and prevention

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



**Hepatitis A is a notifiable condition<sup>1</sup>**

## How hepatitis A is spread

The infection is spread when faeces (poo) containing the hepatitis A virus contaminate hands, objects, water or food and the virus enters the mouth. Hepatitis A virus can survive in the environment for a long time.

In Australia, most cases of hepatitis A are associated with the following situations and/or activities

- > childcare centres caring for children who are not yet toilet trained
- > household contacts of people infected with hepatitis A
- > overseas travel to high-risk countries
- > injecting and oral drug use
- > sexual contacts, especially men who have sex with men.

## Signs and symptoms of

Symptoms include:

- > abdominal pain
- > loss of appetite
- > nausea (and sometimes vomiting)
- > fever and chills
- > mild headache
- > tiredness

- > yellow skin and/or eyes (jaundice – see image)
- > dark urine and pale faeces.

Adults and older children are more likely to have symptoms lasting 1 to 2 weeks, or in severe cases, up to several months.

Young children may have few or no symptoms.

Most people recover fully and subsequently will have life-long immunity. Death from hepatitis A is rare.



*Image Courtesy Public Health Image Library (PHIL), Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC-USA) CDC, Dr. Thomas F. Sellers / Emory University*

## Diagnosis

A diagnosis is made by a blood test.

## Incubation period

*(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)*

On average 28 days, with a range of 15 to 50 days.

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## Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

A person is considered infectious from:

- > 2 weeks prior to the onset of illness to 2 weeks after the onset of illness,
- > Or, 1 week after the onset of jaundice if it occurs.

## Treatment

- > There is no specific antiviral treatment for hepatitis A
- > Rest, good fluid intake and a change in diet may decrease symptoms
- > Severely ill patients require admission to hospital
- > Certain medications and alcohol can worsen the stress on the liver and should be discussed with your doctor.

## Prevention

- > [Exclude people with hepatitis A from childcare, preschool, school and work](#) for 7 days after the onset of jaundice (if present) or 2 weeks from the onset of illness if there is no jaundice
- > Follow good personal hygiene practices, especially thorough hand washing
- > Good food handling procedures should always be followed
- > A single dose of hepatitis A vaccine provides some protection within 2 weeks of having the vaccine. A second dose 6 months later gives long lasting protection. See [Hepatitis A vaccine](#) for detailed information on people for whom the vaccine is recommended.

## Immunisation and immunoglobulin

The Public Health unit will identify close contacts at risk of infection and arrange for those at risk to receive information and necessary preventative treatment.

- > [Hepatitis A vaccine](#) can prevent infection if given within 2 weeks of contact with an infectious person
  - > The vaccine is offered to household contacts and/or sexual contacts of the person with hepatitis A who are not already immune to hepatitis A
  - > A contact is any person who has been close enough to an infected person to be at risk of getting the infection from that person.
  - > If contacts are under 1 year of age, have a lowered immune system, have chronic liver disease, or any another reason that the hepatitis A vaccine is not recommended, hepatitis A immunoglobulin can be offered
- Immunoglobulin is a solution containing human antibodies that is made from blood products
- > Contacts (including those given vaccine or immunoglobulin) may remain infectious to others even if they do not develop symptoms themselves and should therefore continue to follow good personal hygiene practices.

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## Useful links

SA Health website

<https://sahealth.sa.gov.au>

- > [Hand hygiene](#)
- > [Immunisation program](#)
- > [When you have a notifiable condition](#)
- > [Vaccines](#)

You've Got What

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/YouveGotWhat>

- > [Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E summary](#)
- > [Exclusions period from childcare, preschool, school and work](#)
- > [Protecting yourself and your health whilst you are travelling overseas](#)

1 – In South Australia the law requires doctors and laboratories to report some infections or diseases to SA Health. These infections or diseases are commonly referred to as 'notifiable conditions'.

## You've Got What? Hepatitis A

Communicable Disease Control Branch

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The SA Health Disclaimer for this resource is located at [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat)

Official

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\*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group



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