

# Hepatitis A

## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes your liver to become swollen. Most people who have it don't show any signs of illness. This can make it hard to tell if you have it. You may not be hungry, or you may feel sick to your stomach. You may be tired or have sore muscles. Bright lights may bother you. Other symptoms include changes in taste and smell, coughing, and fever. Your urine may be dark, and your stools may be a lighter color than usual. Your skin may turn yellow or orange. This is called jaundice (JON-diss), which is common in adults who have hepatitis A.

## Who gets it and why?

Children get hepatitis A more often than adults. You can get it by eating spoiled foods or from other unclean items. You may also be more likely to catch it if you travel to countries that have poor hygiene, if you use drugs, or if you already have liver disease.

## How can my doctor tell I have it?

Your doctor will need to do a blood test to confirm you have been exposed to the virus.

## Is it catching?

Yes, you can catch it for two weeks before and at least one week after symptoms appear. Most

children have been vaccinated against hepatitis A in the past few years, and are unlikely to catch it.

## How is it treated?

In most cases, the virus goes away on its own. You should rest, drink plenty of water, and eat food as normal (as long as it doesn't make you feel bad). You should not drink alcohol.

## How soon will I get better?

Hepatitis A is usually a mild disease. Most people recover within a few weeks to a few months.

## How can I prevent hepatitis A?

All children should get the hepatitis A vaccine as infants. If you are at high risk (e.g., overseas travel, health conditions, use drugs), ask your doctor about the vaccine.

## Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

<http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/liver/897.html>

American Liver Foundation

<http://www.liverfoundation.org/abouttheliver/info/hepatitisa/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/A/index.htm>

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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