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.

How soon will I get better?
Hepatitis A is usually a mild disease. Most people recover in 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/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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