

## Vaccination

There is a hepatitis A vaccine. It is recommended for:

- people travelling to places where hepatitis A is common (includes most developing countries)
- people living or working in remote Aboriginal communities
- staff in day care centres
- the intellectually disabled and their carers
- sewage workers
- men who have sex with men
- people with chronic liver disease.

You need 2 vaccinations, 6 to 12 months apart for best protection. There is also a combined hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine.

Talk to your doctor if you are thinking about hepatitis A vaccination.

## Safer sex practices

Use dental dams to prevent spreading hepatitis A during oral-anal sex. You can get them sexual health clinics and some chemists.

## Overseas travel

If you are travelling to places where hepatitis A is common (including most developing countries), take special care to avoid infections. Be very careful when you choose or prepare food and drink. **'Cook it, peel it, boil it or forget it'** is good advice.

See your doctor and discuss your travel plans **at least 6 weeks** in advance. Vaccination against hepatitis A is often a good idea.

## Where to go

Contact a doctor, or

- Your local government environmental health officer
- Your community nurse
- Your Regional Population Health Unit
- Your local hospital (country)
- Communicable Disease Control Directorate, Department of Health, (08) 9388 4999

You can find more information about hepatitis on the Internet:

[www.population.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.population.health.wa.gov.au)

[www.hepnet.com](http://www.hepnet.com)

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis)

[www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov)



Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Program

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# HEPATITIS A

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## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis means sickness of the liver. It can be caused by viruses such as hepatitis A, B, C, D, E and G, alcohol, some chemicals and drugs.

## Signs and symptoms

Symptoms usually appear about 4 weeks after you've been infected. Common symptoms include:

- tiredness
- body aches and pains
- loss of appetite
- feeling sick and vomiting
- fever and chills
- upper stomach pain, usually on the right side
- eyes or skin turning yellow (jaundice).

Young children often have no symptoms, but most older children and adults do.

The symptoms usually last for a few weeks, but the tiredness can last longer.

**If you or your child develops these symptoms, see your doctor for a blood test.**

Deaths from hepatitis A are rare, but some people get very sick.

## How is it spread?

The Hepatitis A virus is found in the faeces of infected people. It's usually spread by close personal contact with an infected person, or by eating or drinking contaminated (dirty) food or water.

People at most risk are:

- people who live with someone who has hepatitis A
- people with poor hygiene, especially poor hand washing
- people in jobs where they may be exposed to the virus, including child care and sewage workers
- people travelling to other countries where hepatitis A is common.

Young children have very close contact with each other, so it's easy for the virus to spread between children, particularly if they're still in nappies.

## Treatment

Talk to your doctor. There is no special treatment for hepatitis A. Most people get well on their own after a few months, but a few older children and adults may need to go to hospital. Lots of rest and a good diet help.

You can't get hepatitis A more than once.

## Can I still go to work?

People who handle food or drink professionally, child care and health care workers, and swimming instructors **must not go to work** for at least 1 week after jaundice develops. Check with your doctor.

## Protecting yourself

If you have had close contact with an infected person, **see your doctor as soon as possible**, as there are ways to stop or lessen the infection.

### *Hand washing and hygiene*

Always wash your hands (use soap, and rub hands together really well for 15 seconds):

- after going to the toilet
- after changing nappies
- before eating;
- before preparing food.

The hepatitis A virus can survive in moist places for weeks. If you or a family member has hepatitis A, you need to clean all surfaces which could have the virus on it for at least 1 week after jaundice develops. This includes door handles, toilet seats and handles, taps and nappy change tables.

If you have hepatitis A, **don't prepare or handle other people's food.**