



Facts At-A-Glance

- ❑ Hepatitis A is a viral infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.
- ❑ The hepatitis A virus is most commonly transmitted by food or water that has been contaminated with feces from someone infected by the virus.
- ❑ As many as one out of three Americans will get hepatitis A during their lifetime.
- ❑ Symptoms are usually mild in children, but adults may experience severe fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite and jaundice that may last from a few weeks to a few months.
- ❑ Nearly all people recover from hepatitis A within six months without any lasting health problems. A small percentage may take longer for full recovery.
- ❑ There is no long-lasting or chronic infection with hepatitis A.
- ❑ The average adult patient can miss up to five weeks of work due to the illness.
- ❑ Once you recover from hepatitis A you cannot get it again.
- ❑ Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis A.

At the American Liver Foundation,
we are committed to liver health
and we are here to help you.
Contact us!



Your Liver. Your Life.

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For more information or to find a local chapter near you,
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National HelpLine 800-GO-LIVER (800-465-4837)

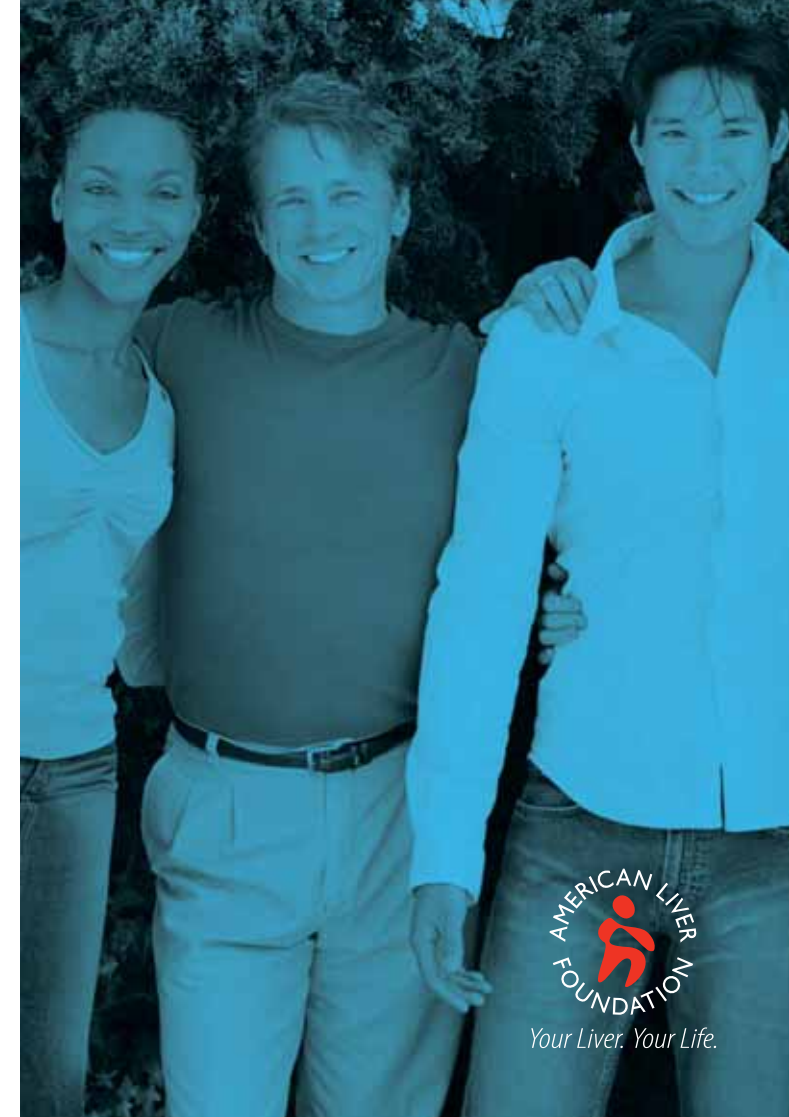
The American Liver Foundation is the nation's leading nonprofit organization promoting liver health and disease prevention. We provide research, education, and advocacy for those affected by liver-related diseases, including hepatitis.

The American Liver Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.
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Hepatitis A

What You Need to Know —

Important information about this common liver disease
and how to prevent it.



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What causes hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a disease of the liver that is caused by the hepatitis A virus. Most cases of the disease are caused by consuming food or water contaminated with fecal matter that contains the virus. Common causes of transmission include:

- ❑ Poor personal hygiene by people involved with food or meal preparation
- ❑ Eating raw or undercooked shellfish that came from waters polluted by sewage
- ❑ Failure to wash hands after changing a diaper

Where does hepatitis A infection most commonly occur?

Hepatitis A infection is likely to occur wherever hygiene may be a problem. Outbreaks have been reported at daycare centers, where the virus spreads through fecal-oral contamination due to diaper changing. Outbreaks have also occurred at military installations, institutions for the disabled and prisons. Occasionally, hepatitis A spreads within households or at restaurants.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Symptoms of hepatitis A can occur two to seven weeks after infection with the virus. The symptoms are usually mild. Low energy is the most common symptom. Others may include fever, loss of appetite, nausea, fatigue, headache, muscle soreness, pain near the liver and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes). The symptoms almost always go away within two months. Children may not have any symptoms.

Outbreaks have been reported at daycare centers, where the virus spreads through fecal-oral contamination due to diaper changing.

Another important way to prevent getting and spreading hepatitis A is by practicing good personal hygiene.

How is hepatitis A diagnosed?

Hepatitis A is diagnosed with a blood test. If you think you have hepatitis A, it is important to see a doctor right away to get a diagnosis. Symptoms of hepatitis A are similar to those of other liver diseases that can be potentially more serious.

How is hepatitis A treated?

Medicines are not used to treat hepatitis A because the symptoms are usually mild and the disease goes away on its own in almost all cases. People with hepatitis A should reduce the pace of their daily activities to match their loss of energy. A balanced diet with plenty of fluids is also helpful.

Your liver's ability to break down drugs is weakened while you have hepatitis A and alcohol may cause further damage to your liver. Therefore, if you have hepatitis A, you should not take any drug or herbal supplement unless approved by your doctor, and avoid alcohol.

Other tips for hepatitis A patients:

Be aware that you can spread the virus even if you do not have symptoms, so be sure to practice good personal hygiene at all times.

You may experience itchy skin; this can be controlled with non-prescription anti-itch medicine.

Can hepatitis A cause serious complications?

In the United States, there are about 100 deaths a year due to hepatitis A. Those at risk of serious complications from the disease include people with other liver diseases and people over 60. These patients may suffer liver failure after becoming infected with hepatitis A.

What is the best way to prevent hepatitis A?

Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis A because it gives you long-term immunity. The hepatitis A vaccine is given in two doses, usually about six months apart. Vaccination is recommended for:

- ❑ All children age one or older
- ❑ Travelers to regions with poor sanitation or where hepatitis A is common, such as the Middle East, South America, Eastern Europe, Central America, Africa, Southeast Asia, Mexico and the Caribbean
- ❑ Patients with long-term liver disease or blood-clotting disorders such as hemophilia
- ❑ People who have had, or are waiting for, a liver transplant
- ❑ People who use illegal drugs
- ❑ Men who have sex with men

If you think you have been exposed to the hepatitis A virus, your doctor may give you a shot of immune globulin, which helps boost immunity to infection. The immune globulin should be given within two weeks of exposure to the hepatitis A virus.

Another important way to prevent getting and spreading hepatitis A is by practicing good personal hygiene. Always clean your hands with soap and warm water immediately after using the bathroom or changing a diaper, and before preparing or eating food.

If you have hepatitis A, you should avoid alcohol and not take any drug or herbal supplement unless approved by your doctor.