

## HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. Several different viruses cause viral hepatitis. They are named hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E viruses. All of these viruses cause acute (or short-term) viral hepatitis whereas some can cause chronic hepatitis (where the infection is prolonged and in some cases, lifelong.)

Other viruses may also cause hepatitis, but they have yet to be discovered and they are obviously rare causes of the disease.

Symptoms of hepatitis include jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, low grade fever and headache. Some persons, however, do not have symptoms. Hepatitis A usually resolves on its own over several weeks but a severe life threatening form of hepatitis can occur among persons co-infected with hepatitis B and/or C.

Hepatitis A is spread through food or water contaminated by feces from an infected person or oral-fecal contact during unprotected sex. Rarely, it spreads through contact with infected blood.

Persons at risk for contracting hepatitis A include international travelers; people living in areas where hepatitis A outbreaks are common; people who live with or have sex with an infected person; men who have sex with men, injection drug users and, during outbreaks, day care children and employees.

Hepatitis A infection can be prevented by the hepatitis A vaccine; also, avoiding tap water when traveling internationally and practicing good hygiene and sanitation.

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