



### **Will I need treatment?**

Most people recover completely from HAV without specific treatment. For others, the infection persists for weeks. Affected persons should drink plenty of fluids, take a light diet and avoid alcohol for 6 months to allow the liver to recover.

### **When can I return to work? When can children return to school or childcare?**

People with hepatitis A are infectious for 2 weeks prior to any signs or symptoms and for 1 week after the onset of jaundice. You should stay away from work or school until you have recovered and your jaundice has cleared. Children who are jaundiced should not go to school for 7 days following the appearance of the jaundice. Thereafter the doctor should advise when the child is well enough to go back to school.

**For further information  
please log onto our website:**

<http://www.nhsggc.org.uk>

***If you are worried that you have contracted Hepatitis A you should contact your General Practitioner (GP). If you would simply like more information contact either your GP or the Public Health Protection Unit at Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Board.  
Tel: 0141-201-4917***

Public Health Protection Unit  
West House  
Gartnavel Royal Hospital  
1055 Great Western Road  
Glasgow G12 0XH

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## **Hepatitis A**

### **Patient information leaflet**

Public Health Protection Unit 0141 201 4917

[phpu@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:phpu@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)

## What is Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A (HAV) is a viral infection of the liver which can cause a range of illnesses from mild, non specific symptoms, through to liver inflammation, jaundice and, rarely, liver failure. However, often HAV does not cause any symptoms, particularly in children, who may be unaware that they have had the infection. Mostly, HAV is a self-limiting condition which clears up by itself and most people recover with no long term problems.

People who get this virus often become infected during travel to countries where hygiene is poor or water and sewage services are below standard.

Once you have had HAV, you will usually have lifelong immunity to it.

## Where does it come from?

Hepatitis A is now an uncommon infection in the U.K and many cases are related to travel overseas. You can be infected with the hepatitis A virus by:

- Close contact with someone who has hepatitis A
- Eating food prepared by someone with the infection who hasn't washed their hands properly or washed them in water contaminated with sewage
- Drinking contaminated water (including ice cubes)
- Eating raw or undercooked shellfish from contaminated water
- Person to person spread if hygiene is poor
- Having sex with someone who has the infection (this is particularly a risk for men who have sex with men) or injecting drugs using contaminated equipment

## What are the symptoms?

Not everyone has symptoms. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 2 to 6 weeks after infection and can include:

Flu-like symptoms  
Jaundice (a yellow discolouration of the whites of the eyes and often the skin)  
fever  
dark urine  
grey coloured stools  
nausea/vomiting  
anorexia  
Fatigue

Symptoms are more likely to occur in adults than in children. They usually last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill for as long as 6 months.

## How does it spread?

HAV is infectious and is normally spread by the faecal-oral route, person to person by infected faeces (stools) and poor hygiene. It can also be spread occasionally through blood. Transmission within households is very common. The faeces from infected people are infectious for two weeks before the person becomes ill and for about a week after the jaundice appears. Children without symptoms may be infectious for several weeks longer.

Spread of infection can be prevented by good hygiene, especially hand washing, and immunisation. It is therefore important that close contacts of cases receive hepatitis A vaccine. People travelling abroad to countries where sanitation is poor are at risk of becoming infected. It is always advisable to seek travel health advice from your GP before undertaking any foreign travel, ideally 6 weeks prior to departure. A vaccine against hepatitis A is available and can be obtained from a GP/travel health clinic before travelling to countries where HAV is common.

## Can I prevent infection?

Good hygiene is important in preventing spread. This includes:

- safe disposal of faeces, washing hands thoroughly with soap and warm water.
  - Toilets (handles and seats) should be kept clean
  - Personal hygiene, especially toilet hygiene in nurseries and schools
  - Maintain good standard of hygiene, wash hands before eating or preparing food and after using the toilet.
  - Use bottled water when travelling abroad.
  - Eat fruit you peel yourself
  - Eat only hot freshly prepared food
  - Do not eat raw shellfish, it should be steamed for at least 90 seconds or heated at 85-90oC for 4 minutes before eating
  - Immunisation against Hepatitis A before travelling to high risk countries.
- ## Who should be immunised against hepatitis A infection?
- People travelling to or going to reside in areas of high or intermediate prevalence. The highest risk areas include the Indian sub-continent, in particular India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Africa, parts of the Far East, South and Central America and the middle East.
  - Close contacts of someone with Hepatitis A
  - People with chronic liver disease
  - People exposed to hepatitis a at work such as laboratory and sewage workers
  - Patients with haemophilia
  - Injecting drug users
  - Men who have sex with men