

## What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that infects the liver. People with Hepatitis A vary in how sick they feel. The younger you are when you become infected, the less likely you are to feel sick. However, the majority of adults will feel unwell, lose their appetite, develop nausea and fatigue and may feel they have the flu. Some people go off coffee and cigarettes. Many people develop jaundice, a yellow tinge in the whites of the eyes and skin. The urine may become very dark. Rarely, people develop an intense itch.

## How is Hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is spread from person to person, or through food contaminated with faeces that contains the Hepatitis A virus. There are other hepatitis viruses such as Hepatitis B and C which are spread through sexual activity or through blood contact, such as sharing needles, or at birth. This is hardly ever the case with Hepatitis A.

## How do I know if I have Hepatitis A?

If your GP suspects you have Hepatitis A they will arrange a blood test to check your liver function and see if you have antibodies to the Hepatitis A virus in your blood. There are two sorts of antibody: the IgM, which shows that you have the infection now, and the IgG, which shows you have had the infection in the past. Many adults have IgG antibodies without any memory of ever being jaundiced because they had Hepatitis when they were small children and weren't very sick at all.

## Who is infectious?

People are most infectious before they become sick, when they don't know anything is wrong. By the time you know you have Hepatitis A you aren't very infectious at all. Young children may be infectious but show no obvious signs of infection. You may want to

ask your doctor if family members should be vaccinated to reduce their chance of becoming infected.

## How is Hepatitis A treated?

There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A. Most people feel unwell for a week or two and then gradually get better. However, it's best to avoid alcohol and, if possible, medication while the liver is inflamed from the virus. People with Hepatitis A are sometimes sick enough to go to hospital but this is very rare.

## Can I get chronic liver damage from Hepatitis A?

No. Unlike Hepatitis B and C, Hepatitis A does not cause chronic liver damage or cirrhosis of the liver.

## Can I be infected with Hepatitis A again?

No. Once you have had Hepatitis A you become immune to further infection with this specific virus.

## Who is most at risk of infection?

- People who travel to Third World countries
- Child care workers
- Men who have sex with men
- People who live in institutions
- Sewerage workers
- Health care workers
- Aboriginal people

## What can I do to protect myself from Hepatitis A?

There is a safe and effective vaccine for Hepatitis A available. You can get this through your GP. There is also a vaccine that protects against both Hepatitis A and the more serious Hepatitis B. Some people may be advised to have this vaccine. If you are travelling to Asia or another part of the world where there is a high level of Hepatitis A or if you are at risk because of your profession, you should discuss vaccination with your doctor.

## Digestive Health Foundation

The Digestive Health Foundation (DHF) is committed to promoting better health for all Australians through education and community health programs related to the digestive system. The DHF is the educational arm of the Gastroenterological Society of Australia (GESA). GESA is the professional body representing the specialty of gastrointestinal and liver disease. Members of the Society are drawn from physicians, surgeons, scientists and other medical specialties with an interest in gastrointestinal disorders. GI disorders are the most common health related problems affecting the community.

Research and education into gastrointestinal disease are essential to contain the effects of these disorders on all Australians.

Further information on a wide variety of gastrointestinal conditions is available on our website.

## Digestive Health Foundation

c/-GESA

145 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Phone: (02) 9256 5454

Facsimile: (02) 9241 4586

E-mail: [gesa@gesa.org.au](mailto:gesa@gesa.org.au)

Website: <http://www.gesa.org.au>

© Copyright. Digestive Health Foundation, September 2002.

*This brochure is promoted as a public service by the Digestive Health Foundation. This leaflet cannot be completely comprehensive and is intended as a guide only. The information given here is current at the time of printing, but may change in the future. If you have further questions you should raise them with your own doctor.*

# HEPATITIS A

facts about...

## HEPATITIS A



# HEPATITIS A

Second Edition 2002



An information leaflet for patients and interested members of the general public prepared by the Digestive Health Foundation