
Hepatitis A

Description: Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. It is diagnosed by doing a blood test.

Symptoms: Early symptoms include abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, nausea, low-grade fever and tiredness. Later in the illness, a person may experience yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes, dark urine and pale-colored stools. Children under 3 rarely have symptoms but are frequently involved in spreading the infection. Older children and adults are much more likely to have symptoms which may be mild, lasting one-two weeks, or severe lasting up to several months.

How it is Spread: Hepatitis A virus is found in stool. Unwashed hands contaminated with stool from an infected person carry the virus to another person's mouth. It may be spread indirectly from one person to another by objects or food touched by unwashed contaminated hands.

Incubation: 2-6 weeks, commonly 28-30 days.

How Long Can a Person Spread the Infection To Others? A person is most infectious in the two weeks before yellowing (jaundice) occurs and slightly infectious for the first week of jaundice.

Responsibility of Parents and Caregivers:

- Notify the local health department if any child or adult in your program develops **Hepatitis A. (See ODH Communicable Disease Chart).**
- Inform parents of illness and symptoms to watch for in the child.
- Ask parents to notify caregiver if their child gets this illness.
- Do not accept new children for child care until four weeks after the last case.

Control of Spread:

- Exclude the ill staff or child until 10 days after initial onset of symptoms.
- Consult with the local health department to determine who needs to receive immune globulin. This is very important! Immune globulin, if given within two weeks after exposure, usually prevents hepatitis A or causes symptoms to be milder.
- Be sure good hand washing and cleaning procedures are being followed in the child care home and in the child's home.

Treatment: Once symptoms develop, there is no treatment for hepatitis A. The illness will stop as the body fights off the virus. Immune globulin (a shot) may prevent symptoms from occurring when given to contacts soon after exposure. Children usually do not have symptoms when ill, but can still spread the infection. The first sign of hepatitis A outbreak in a child care setting is likely to be an ill parent or caregiver, not an ill child.

Vaccine-A vaccine is available to prevent hep A, but it is not currently licensed for children less than 1 year of age.