

What you need to know about hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

- Hepatitis A is an acute liver disease caused by hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection.
- The incubation period is usually 14 - 28 days.
- People with hepatitis A may be asymptomatic, while some may have clinical features similar to other types of hepatitis, such as fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, upper abdominal discomfort, tea-coloured urine and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of eyes).
- **Adults have signs and symptoms of illness more often than children**, and the severity of disease is higher in older age groups. Recovery may take several weeks or months.
- **Most patients have a complete recovery.** In rare cases, hepatitis A may lead to liver failure and even death.
- People recovered from hepatitis A usually develop lifelong immunity against the infection. Hepatitis A does not cause chronic liver disease.

How is hepatitis A transmitted?

- HAV is transmitted primarily by the **faecal-oral route**; that is through ingestion and contact of food, water or objects that has been contaminated with the virus.
 - HAV can persist in faeces and soil for a prolonged period of time. It is resistant to acidic environment (low pH) and heat (60 °C for 60 minutes) as well as to freezing temperatures.
- HAV can also be transmitted through **close personal contact** or **sexual contact** (not limited to anal-oral contact) with an infectious person.

How to treat hepatitis A?

- Therapy is aimed at maintaining comfort and adequate nutritional balance, including replacement of fluids that are lost from vomiting and diarrhoea.
- There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A.

How to prevent hepatitis A?

- **Personal hygiene** - Perform hand hygiene before handling food or eating. Flush the toilet after use and wash hands with soap.
- **Food hygiene** - Drink boiled water. Eat thoroughly cleaned and cooked food, especially bivalves such as oysters, clams, mussels and scallops.
- **Environmental hygiene** - Treat contaminated water and sewage properly. Handle

and store drinking water properly. Keep kitchens and utensils clean.

- **Receive hepatitis A vaccination**

Hepatitis A vaccine

Suitable for people **aged one year or above**.

- A complete course of vaccination takes a total of **two doses**. The second dose is usually given 6 to 18 months after the first dose.
- Hepatitis A vaccine can **effectively prevent HAV infection**. One month after receiving the first dose of hepatitis A vaccine, about 95% of people would produce protective antibody levels against infection. Completion of the two-dose course of vaccination can provide long-term protection against HAV infection.
- **Very safe** with minor side effects (e.g. pain at injection site)
- Anyone who has ever had allergic reaction after previous hepatitis A vaccination or is allergic to any component in hepatitis A vaccine should not receive the vaccine.
- **People at higher risk of infection** should consider hepatitis A vaccination, such as travellers to endemic areas of hepatitis A (should receive the first dose of hepatitis A vaccine at least 2 weeks before departure) and men who have sex with men.
- **People with chronic liver diseases** (such as chronic hepatitis B or C) should receive hepatitis A vaccination to prevent co-infection with HAV, which poses additional burden to the liver.

For hepatitis A vaccination, please consult your family doctor.



www.hepatitis.gov.hk

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