

## **Hepatitis A**

### **WHAT IS HEPATITIS A?**

Hepatitis A is a viral infection of the liver. Typical signs and symptoms of hepatitis A are a loss of appetite, nausea, feeling tired, fever, abdominal discomfort, dark urine and jaundice (yellowish colour of the skin and eyes). Infection with no illness is common in infants and young children but they are still able to spread the virus to other people. Symptoms of infection become more severe as people get older. These symptoms often start suddenly and then disappear on their own after about four to six weeks. For some people the symptoms may last longer but eventually they do go away.

Most people recover completely. In adults, once the symptoms are gone the virus cannot be passed on to others. Once you have been infected with the hepatitis A virus, your body will produce antibodies which protect you against being infected again (i.e. you become immune).

### **HOW IS HEPATITIS A SPREAD?**

Hepatitis A is passed on through contact with infected feces (stool or bowel movement) which enter the mouth. This can happen through oral sex on the anus, also known as “rimming”. Hepatitis A can also enter the body when someone handles a used condom after anal sex, or fingers a partner’s anus and then places the same finger in the mouth. The virus can also be spread by water contaminated with feces. Food can be contaminated with the virus if it is washed with water containing the virus. It can also be passed on if a person with hepatitis A does not wash their hands carefully after a bowel movement or before they prepare foods. Outbreaks have also occurred among injection and non-injection drug users.

Hepatitis A is not spread by casual contact with an infected person.

### **HOW IS HEPATITIS A TREATED?**

There is no treatment that can kill the virus. Infected people should stay at home and rest until they feel better. They should also avoid alcohol for several months to give the liver a chance to heal. Most people who get Hepatitis A recover completely and are then protected from future infection by their own natural immunity.

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## **HOW IS HEPATITIS A PREVENTED?**

- There is a vaccine to prevent Hepatitis A. Talk with your nurse or doctor to decide if this vaccine would be a good idea for you.
- Careful hand washing with soap and water is important, especially after a bowel movement, having sex or changing a diaper and also before making food, eating, drinking, smoking or using street drugs.
- Wash uncooked foods thoroughly before eating.
- Using a condom during vaginal, anal or oral sex will also reduce the risk of getting the virus from an infected sexual partner.
- Do not share needles and syringes.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

**Call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at 416-392-2437  
Or go to  
[www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health)**

### **SAFER SEX**

**To reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), use a condom every time you have genital contact, vaginal, anal or oral sex.**

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