

Hepatitis A is an inflammation (irritation and swelling) of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.

Causes, incidence, and risk factors

Hepatitis A is transmitted by contaminated food or water, or contact with a person who is currently ill with the disease. The hepatitis A virus is shed in the stools of an infected person during the incubation period of 15 to 45 days before symptoms occur and during the first week of illness. Blood and other bodily secretions may also be infectious.

The virus does not remain in the body after the infection has resolved, and there is no carrier state (a person or animal who spreads the disease to others but does not become ill).

The symptoms associated with hepatitis A are similar to the flu, but the skin and eyes may become yellow (jaundiced). This is because the liver is not able to filter bilirubin from the blood. There are approximately 100,000 total infections in the U.S. every year.

Risk factors include living in a nursing home or rehabilitation center, having a family member who recently had hepatitis A, intravenous drug use, and recent travel to -- or immigration from -- Asia, or South or Central America.

Other common hepatitis virus infections include hepatitis B and hepatitis C, but hepatitis A is the least serious of these diseases. Both of the others may become chronic illnesses, but hepatitis A does not.

(to prevent Hepatitis A) The HAV vaccine is a two dose series which begins to protect 4 weeks after receiving the initial dose. The 6- to 12-month booster is required for long-term protection.

Symptoms

- [Jaundice](#)
- [Fatigue](#)
- [Loss of appetite](#)
- Nausea and [vomiting](#)
- Low-grade fever
- Pale or clay-colored stools
- Dark urine
- Generalized itching

Hepatitis B is caused by infection with the hepatitis B virus (HBV). This infection has 2 phases: acute and chronic.

- Acute (new, short-term) hepatitis B occurs shortly after exposure to the virus. A small number of people develop a very severe, life-threatening form of acute hepatitis called fulminant hepatitis.
 - Chronic (ongoing, long-term) hepatitis B is an infection with HBV that lasts longer than 6 months. Once the infection becomes chronic, it may never go away completely.
 - About 90-95% of people who are infected are able to fight off the virus so their infection never becomes chronic. Only about 5-10 percent of adults infected with HBV go on to develop chronic infection.
 - HBV infection is one of the most important causes of infectious hepatitis.
- People with chronic HBV infection are called chronic carriers. About two-thirds of these people do not themselves get sick or die of the virus, but they can transmit it to other people. The remaining one third develop chronic hepatitis B, a disease of the liver that can be very serious.

Hepatitis B Causes

- The hepatitis B virus is known as a blood-borne virus because it is transmitted from one person to another via blood.
 - Semen and saliva, which contain small amounts of blood, also carry the virus.
 - The virus can be transmitted whenever any of these bodily fluids come in contact with the broken skin or a mucous membrane (in the mouth, genital organs, or rectum) of an uninfected person.
- Half of all people infected with the hepatitis B virus have no symptoms.

Symptoms develop within 30-180 days of exposure to the virus. The symptoms are often compared to [flu](#). Most people think they have flu and never think about having HBV infection.

- Appetite loss
- Feeling tired (fatigue)
- [Nausea and vomiting](#)
- Itching all over the body

- Pain over the liver (on the right side of the abdomen, under the lower rib cage)
 - [Jaundice](#) - A condition in which the skin and the whites of the eyes turn yellow in color
 - Urine becomes dark in color (like cola or tea).
 - Stools are pale in color (grayish or clay colored).
- Many types of acute [viral hepatitis](#) have similar symptoms ([hepatitis A](#), [hepatitis C](#)).
 - Fulminant hepatitis is an unusual illness. It is a severe form of acute hepatitis that can be life threatening if not treated right away. The symptoms develop very suddenly.
 - Mental disturbances such as confusion, lethargy, extreme sleepiness or hallucinations (hepatic encephalopathy)
 - Sudden collapse with fatigue
 - Jaundice
 - Swelling of the abdomen
 - Prolonged nausea and vomiting can cause [dehydration](#). If you have been vomiting repeatedly, you may notice these symptoms:
 - Feeling tired or weak
 - Feeling confused or having difficulty concentrating
 - [Headache](#)
 - Not urinating
 - Irritability

(to prevent Hepatitis B) There is a vaccine against the hepatitis B virus (Engerix-B, Recombivax HB). It is safe and works well to prevent the disease. A total of 3 doses of the vaccine are given over several months. (1st vaccine, then one month later, then 6 months later).

Travelers to countries where HBV infection is common - This includes most areas of Africa, Southeast Asia, China and central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, and the Amazon River basin of South America.

Twinrix - a Hepatitis A & B combination vaccine is given 3 times: 1st dose, 1 month and 6 months or can be given on an accelerated schedule for last minute travelers: day 0, day 7, day 14 (series of 3) with 12 month booster later.