

# What I need to know about Hepatitis A



NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH  
National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse

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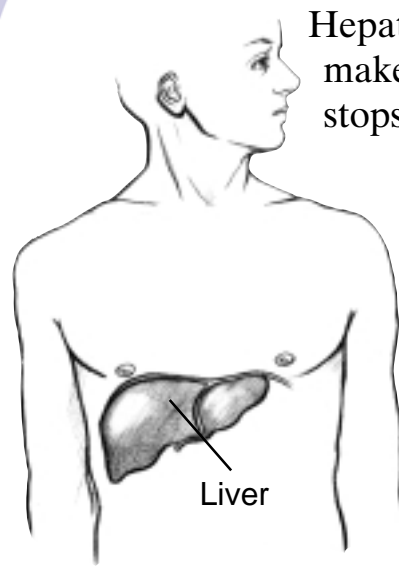
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## Contents

What is hepatitis A? .....	1
What causes hepatitis A? .....	1
How could I get hepatitis A? .....	2
Who can get hepatitis A? .....	3
What are the symptoms? .....	4
How is hepatitis A treated? .....	5
How can I protect myself? .....	6
For more information .....	8
More in the series .....	9
Acknowledgments .....	10

## What is hepatitis A?

**Hepatitis A is a liver disease.**



Hepatitis (HEP-ah-TY-tis) makes your liver swell and stops it from working well.

You need a healthy liver. The liver does many things to keep you alive. The liver fights infections and stops bleeding. It removes drugs and other poisons from your blood. The liver also stores energy for when you need it.

## What causes hepatitis A?

**Hepatitis A is caused by a virus.**

A virus is a germ that causes sickness. (For example, the flu is caused by a virus.) People can pass viruses to each other. The virus that causes hepatitis A is called the hepatitis A virus.

## How could I get hepatitis A?

**Hepatitis A is spread by close personal contact with someone else who has the infection.**

**You could get hepatitis A by**

- eating food that has been prepared by someone with hepatitis A
- drinking water that has been contaminated by hepatitis A (in parts of the world with poor hygiene and sanitary conditions)



Wash your hands before fixing or eating food.

## Who can get hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A.

**But some people are more likely to than others:**

- people who live with someone who has hepatitis A
- children who go to day care
- people who work in a day care center
- men who have sex with men
- people who travel to other countries where hepatitis A is common



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Children in day care could get hepatitis A.

## **What are the symptoms?**

**Hepatitis A can make you feel like you have the flu.**

### **You might**

- feel tired
- feel sick to your stomach
- have a fever
- not want to eat
- have stomach pain
- have diarrhea

### **Some people have**

- dark yellow urine
- light-colored stools
- yellowish eyes and skin

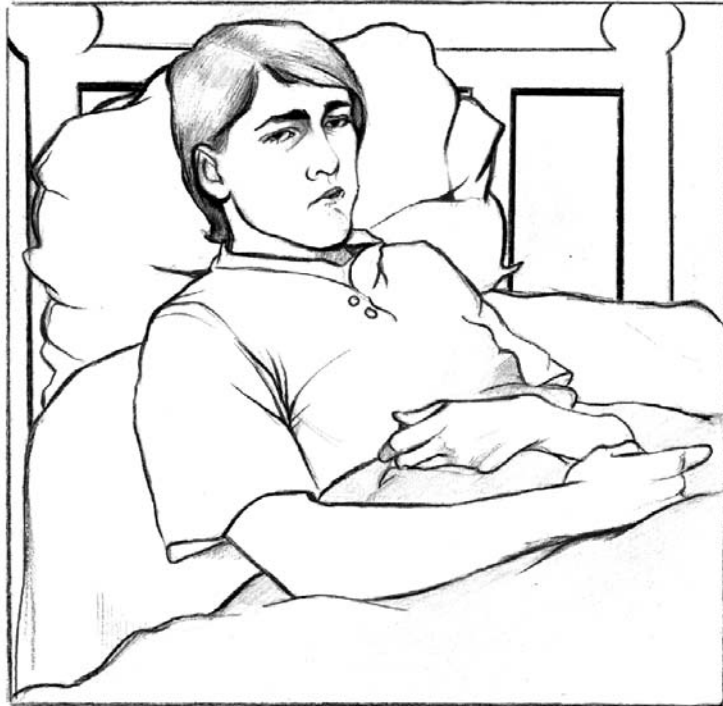
**Some people don't have any symptoms.**

If you have symptoms, or think you might have hepatitis A, go to a doctor. The doctor will test your blood.

## How is hepatitis A treated?

**Most people who have hepatitis A get well on their own after a few weeks.**

You may need to rest in bed for several days or weeks, and you won't be able to drink alcohol until you are well. The doctor may give you medicine for your symptoms.



Bed rest and medicine will help you get better.

## How can I protect myself?

### You can get the hepatitis A vaccine.

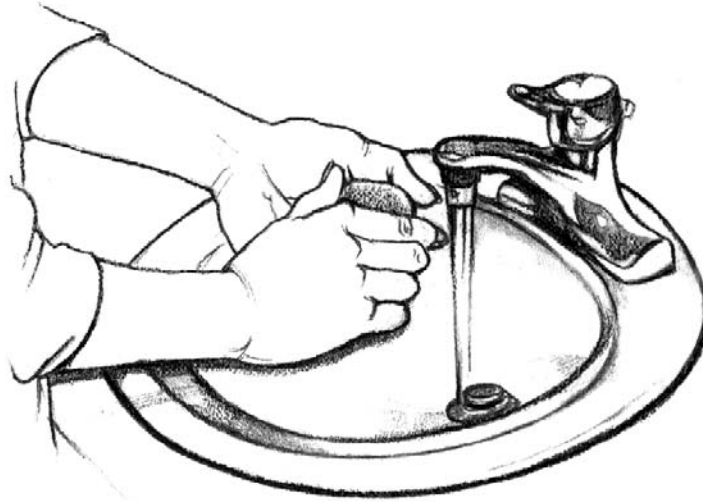
A vaccine is a drug that you take when you are healthy that keeps you from getting sick. Vaccines teach your body to attack certain viruses, like the hepatitis A virus.

The hepatitis A vaccine is given through a shot. Children can get the vaccine after they turn 2 years old. Children age 2 to 18 will need three shots. The shots are spread out over a year. Adults get two or three shots over 6 to 12 months.

You need **all** of the shots to be protected. If you miss a shot, call your doctor or clinic right away to set up a new appointment.



Vaccines protect you from getting hepatitis A.



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Wash your hands to protect yourself.

**You can protect yourself and others from hepatitis A in these ways, too:**

- Always wash your hands after using the toilet and before fixing food or eating.
- Wear gloves if you have to touch other people's stool. Wash your hands afterward.
- Drink bottled water when you are in another country. (And don't use ice cubes or wash fruits and vegetables in tap water.)

## For more information

You can also get information about hepatitis A from these groups:

### **American Liver Foundation**

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 603

New York, NY 10038

Phone: 1-800-465-4837 (This is a free call.)

Email: [webmail@liverfoundation.org](mailto:webmail@liverfoundation.org)

Internet: [www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)

### **Hepatitis Foundation International**

30 Sunrise Terrace

Cedar Grove, NJ 07009-1423

Phone: 1-800-891-0707 (This is a free call.)

Email: [mail@hepfi.org](mailto:mail@hepfi.org)

Internet: [www.hepfi.org](http://www.hepfi.org)

## More in the series

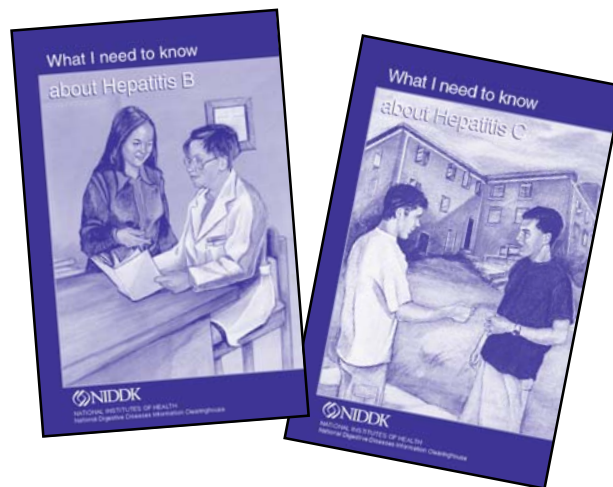
There are other types of hepatitis. The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse also has booklets about hepatitis B and hepatitis C:

- *What I need to know about Hepatitis B*
- *What I need to know about Hepatitis C*

You can get a free copy of these booklets by calling 1-800-891-5389 or (301) 654-3810, or by writing to

**NDDIC**  
2 Information Way  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3570

Hepatitis information for health professionals is also available.



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