

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infectious inflammation of the liver that is triggered by the hepatitis A virus.

How is hepatitis A transmitted?

Hepatitis A is transmitted orally through contact with faecal matter. Transmission can occur through contaminated water, food or articles of daily use but also in the context of close personal contact, e.g. sex (in this case mainly in men who have sex with men). Infection can also occur in a common household or, e.g., a day nursery. Transmission through blood is extremely rare.

What are its symptoms and its consequences?

Hepatitis A is an acute disease characterised by fever, discomfort, jaundice (yellowing of the white of the eye and the skin), loss of appetite and nausea. The incubation period, i.e. the time between infection and onset of the illness, is between 15 and 50 days; the most common incubation period is between 25 and 30 days.

Only 30 % of infected children under six years of age show any symptoms. Symptoms do appear in most infected older children and adults, which in 70 % of cases include jaundice. The illness usually lasts several weeks (up to six months), and in most cases there is a spontaneous recovery.

The infection never becomes chronic and leaves a lifelong immunity.

In very rare instances patients with pre-existing liver disease can suffer a critical loss of liver function (a “fulminant hepatitis”).

How is hepatitis A tested for?

A hepatitis A infection is usually established through a blood sample.

How is hepatitis A treated?

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Only general symptoms such as vomiting and flu-like symptoms can be treated. Those affected need bed rest.

Should sexual partners get treatment as well?

It is important that sexual partners be informed about the hepatitis A infection. Vaccination within seven days of contact with the virus can prevent the disease or lessen its symptoms.

For some conversation tips and information on further support options, see www.lovelife.ch.

How can the infection be prevented?

There is a vaccination against hepatitis A. It is recommended, among others, for travellers to high-risk regions (regions with medium to high prevalence of hepatitis A in the population) and for men who have sex with men. The hepatitis A vaccination is covered by compulsory health insurance for people with increased risk of hepatitis A.

The www.myvaccines.ch website provides you with a personalised electronic vaccination booklet. Have your doctor or pharmacist advise you. The electronic vaccination booklet makes it easier to keep track of your vaccinations.

Beyond vaccination, the most important means of avoiding transmission of hepatitis A includes the observation of the basic rules of hygiene, such as hand washing after using the lavatory, before preparing food and before eating.