



Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a very infectious disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus. It is the most common type of viral hepatitis reported.

What are the symptoms?

Some people infected with hepatitis A may not experience any symptoms. This is especially true of children under 6 years of age. Older children and adults will usually experience symptoms that include nausea, fever, jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes), tiredness, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain and loss of appetite. Symptoms usually subside within two months.

How is hepatitis A treated?

Once a person is sick from hepatitis A, there is no effective treatment. However, rest, drinking a lot of liquids, and good nutrition are important for recovery. Hepatitis A is caused by a virus, so antibiotics will not help.

How do people catch this disease?

Hepatitis A is spread mostly from eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated with fecal matter.

How can we prevent this illness?

The best way to stop the spread of hepatitis A is by frequent and careful hand washing. Wash your hands before eating, after using the bathroom or changing diapers. Carefully wash all fruits and vegetables before eating or serving. Avoid raw shellfish. This virus is killed by cooking, so be sure to cook all food completely. There is also a vaccine available to prevent this disease. The vaccine is recommended for: travelers to some foreign countries; people with chronic liver disease; people who have clotting-factor disorders (e.g. hemophilia); those who use drugs; and men who have sex with men.