



## Hepatitis A

This fact sheet can be made available in other languages or formats on request by contacting 0161 770 6666. For further information please see our detailed fact sheet Information for all.

### What is hepatitis A?

It is a type of virus (germ) that can cause an infection when it is present in your bowel, and it can cause:

- nausea and vomiting;
- abdominal pain;
- fever;
- tiredness;
- loss of appetite; and sometimes
- jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes, dark coloured urine, and pale coloured stools / motions).

The incubation period (the time taken from swallowing the germs until the illness starts) can be between 15 and 50 days, but averages at 28 days.

If you have symptoms they usually last less than 2 months, but for some it may go on several months.

However, you might have the hepatitis A infection and not show any signs or symptoms of the disease.

### Who can it affect?

Anyone who is not immune. Children and young adults are particularly affected because many adults over 40 have already developed immunity. In general, the severity of symptoms increases with age.

## **How is hepatitis A caught?**

There are several ways of catching it:

- It can be spread from person to person by swallowing the germs which have been passed from the bowel of someone who is carrying it. For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where good personal hygiene is not observed;
- Infections can result from contact with a household member or sexual partner who has the virus;
- It can be caught from contaminated food and water, e.g. raw or undercooked contaminated shellfish;
- Eating contaminated food or drinking water in a country where hepatitis A is more common than the UK;

## **How do you prevent hepatitis A?**

By good hygiene practices, particularly handwashing and cleaning.

- Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, after going to the toilet and before preparing, serving and eating food;
- Always clean a toilet thoroughly after someone known to have the virus has used it;
- Avoid eating raw and undercooked shellfish such as oysters, mussels etc.;
- Avoid swimming in potentially contaminated water, and only drink water from safe sources;
- Get vaccinated if you travel abroad to a country where hepatitis is more common. Your GP or practice nurse will give you advice about this;
- Since cases are becoming more common in homosexual males, immunisation should be sought if your lifestyle places you at risk.

## **Do I need to stay off work or school?**

Yes, for 7 days after the start of symptoms.

If your job involves handling food, or is with young children or in healthcare, you must inform your employer and / or seek advice from the Environmental Health Department (see below for contact details).

## **What do I do if I or another member of my household has the virus?**

Make sure everybody washes his or her hands thoroughly with warm water and soap:

- After using or cleaning the toilet;
- After looking after another person with diarrhoea
- After changing a baby's nappy;
- After handling or washing soiled clothes and bedding;
- Before eating or preparing food.

Ensure each person affected has his or her own towel. You may need to supervise children to make sure they wash their hands properly.

Wash any soiled clothes or bedding on a hot cycle of the washing machine. Keep soiled washing separate from the rest of the washing.

Clean toilet seats, flush handles and taps frequently with hot soapy water. The toilet bowl should be cleaned with a toilet brush and disinfectant. Make sure the disinfectant conforms to a British Standard and follow the instructions carefully, and keep it in a safe place away from children. Wear rubber gloves to clean the toilet and don't use them for anything else.

Where possible, stay away from others (especially vulnerable people like the elderly and the very young) until your symptoms have stopped. Also try to avoid preparing food for anyone while you have the symptoms.

### **Contacting us**

If you would like more information about hepatitis A, food poisoning and other related illnesses you can contact us by:

#### **Writing to**

Food Safety Team, Chadderton Town Hall, Middleton Road, Chadderton, Oldham, OL9 6PP

#### **Phoning**

0161 770 4484

#### **Faxing**

0161 770 4500

#### **Emailing**

[env.foodsafety@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:env.foodsafety@oldham.gov.uk)

For information about food poisoning and related illnesses please see our other detailed fact sheets listed below:

- **Campylobacter**
- **Cryptosporidiosis**
- **Dysentery (*Shigella*)**
- **E.coli O157**
- **Enteric fever (typhoid and paratyphoid)**
- **Farm visits**
- **Food poisoning**
- **Giardiasis**
- **Hand, foot and mouth disease**
- **Infectious diseases**
- **Salmonella**
- **Staphylococcus aureus**
- **Viral gastroenteritis ('Noroviruses')**

You can also get information from the following:

[www.hpa-nw.org.uk](http://www.hpa-nw.org.uk) - includes infection control guidance for Care Homes, Nurseries and Schools, as well as information on topical matters such as avian flu.

[www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk) - further details on infectious diseases.

[www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk) - good hygiene practices and food safety.

## **We value your comments and suggestions**

We want to provide good quality service for people in Oldham and as we are a public service you have a say in what we do. We want you to be completely satisfied with our services but to ensure this we need to know what you think. What do we do best? Where could we improve things? Do you have any ideas or suggestions? Only by listening to you can we give you the service you deserve.

If you wish to make a comment about our services you can e-mail us on

[customer.feedback@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@oldham.gov.uk)

or you can phone us on 0161 770 4191

or you can write to us:

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Strategy and Resources Directorate  
PO Box 160  
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