



Information about Hepatitis A Infection

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN GIVEN THIS LEAFLET?

Your local council has a responsibility to investigate food poisoning and certain incidents of infectious disease. An officer from your local council's Environmental Health Department is contacting you to try and find out where your infection may have come from and to give advice on preventing further spread to others.

NHS Tayside Health Protection Team has notified your local Environmental Health Department that you or one of your household is suffering from a hepatitis A infection. They are often the first to tell you what type of infection you have rather than your General Practitioner (GP).

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information and to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about hepatitis A infection. **Please take time to read this leaflet.**

What is hepatitis A infection?

Hepatitis A is a viral infection of the liver. It mostly affects children and young adults. Although the symptoms can be unpleasant hepatitis A it is very rarely serious and usually goes away naturally.

It is important that you understand that hepatitis A is different from more serious forms of hepatitis such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C which are spread in different ways.

Where does it come from?

Hepatitis A virus can be found in the faeces (stools) of people with the illness. Hepatitis A occurs in the UK but it is more common in some areas where sanitation and sewage disposal can be poor, particularly the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Central and South America, the Far East and Eastern Europe.

How can you get a hepatitis A infection?

The virus is usually caught by putting something in your mouth that has been contaminated with the stools (faeces) of someone with hepatitis A.

You can become infected by

- Contact with other people who have the illness, **through inadequate hand washing** - after using the toilet, and/or before food handling
- Eating food or raw fruit and vegetables which may be unwashed or prepared using contaminated water
- Eating sea foods particularly shellfish which can be infected if they come from seas which have been contaminated by sewage
- Drinking or swimming in untreated water e.g. rivers, wells, springs or burns
- Sharing contaminated medical equipment such as needles.

What are the usual symptoms?

Some people do not get any symptoms of hepatitis A. This is particularly common with young children. However, the usual symptoms are

- Flu-like symptoms, such as tiredness, general aches and pains, headaches and fever
- Loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhoea
- Stomach pains
- Jaundice, which occurs because your liver is unable to remove a substance in the blood that causes your skin and the whites of your eyes to become yellow, this can cause itchy skin
- Urine may be very dark and stools may become pale.

Once you have recovered from hepatitis A you are likely to be immune from it and are unlikely to ever catch the virus again.

When do the symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start about 2 to 7 weeks after having had contact with the virus.

How long will the symptoms last?

The majority of people recover within a few weeks. Occasionally it can take up to 2 months. In some people the symptoms may return or continue for a longer period.

How do you treat a hepatitis A infection?

The infection will usually settle without any treatment. It is sensible to rest and avoid fatty foods if you feel sick. Try to eat and drink a healthy diet. You should avoid all alcohol while you are ill as your liver will be inflamed. After you recover, try to limit your alcohol intake sensibly.

It is important to drink fluids to replace the water lost through having diarrhoea and vomiting. This applies particularly for babies, children and the elderly.

If a young child has symptoms or if your symptoms continue or are particularly severe, consult your GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

How can I stop others from getting infected?

Please read the advice below on how to avoid getting hepatitis A. There is treatment available for people with whom you have been in close contact (particularly those who live with you) since your symptoms started to prevent them becoming ill. This treatment will only work if given soon after they have had contact with you. The NHS Tayside Health Protection Team can advise and arrange this treatment through the person's GP.

Do I need to stay off nursery, school, work or other activities?

Yes. People who have hepatitis A infection are infectious to others for about 2 weeks before the jaundice starts and until 1 week after the jaundice appeared. Therefore, if you have hepatitis A infection you should stay at home until 1 week after the jaundice first appeared.

If you are an adult you should stay away from work and avoid visiting others. It is important that children who have hepatitis A infection stay away from school, nursery, playgroup or mother and toddler groups and avoid visiting others.

You should tell your employer you have hepatitis A if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health or if you work as a food handler.

If any of your household are young children, work as a food handler, or provide care for or work with vulnerable groups they should stay off school or work until NHS Tayside Health Protection Team are

sure they have not acquired the infection. NHS Tayside Health Protection Team will contact and advise those who may be required to stay off nursery, school, work or other activities

What should I do if I have symptoms again?

If your symptoms return or become more severe for example blood in diarrhoea, jaundice worsens you should see a GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

What should I do if I know of others with similar symptoms?

If a young child develops symptoms or if an adult has symptoms which are severe or last for more than 2 days they should consult their GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

They should, if possible, submit a stool sample via their GP.

You should tell the officer of the Environmental Health Department the details of the others you know to be ill. This information can help in identifying sources of infection.

How can you avoid getting or passing to others a hepatitis A infection?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water

- Before preparing, handling or eating foods
- After handling raw food especially meat or poultry
- As soon as possible after working, feeding, grooming or playing with pets and other animals
- You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals, and eating only in designated areas
- After going to the toilet or changing a child's nappy
- By ensuring young children wash their hands.

Handle food and drink safely

- Thoroughly cook meat and poultry so that they are cooked all the way through, and no blood runs from them
- Thaw frozen food properly before cooking
- Always reheat food thoroughly
- Do not use the same knives, chopping boards and equipment for preparing raw foods and cooked or ready to eat foods
- Thoroughly clean knives, chopping boards and equipment used for preparing raw foods with hot water and detergent after each use
- Never put cooked food back on an unwashed plate previously used for uncooked meat
- Do not wash raw poultry because this will splash germs around
- Store cooked or ready to eat food in the fridge separately from raw meats. Raw foods should not be stored above or beside cooked or ready to eat food.
- Store uncooked meat on the bottom of the fridge to avoid dripping raw meat juices onto other food
- Wash all fruit, salads and vegetables that are to be eaten raw
- Do not drink untreated water or unpasteurised milk
- Do not use ice or drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe
- Do not buy ready to eat foods from shops where you believe food hygiene standards are poor. Report such places to your local Environmental Health Department
- **Do not** prepare food for others until your diarrhoea and vomiting symptoms have been stopped for 48 hours.

Household Measures

Whilst you have symptoms you need to be scrupulously clean around your home.

- Make sure all members of your household wash their hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet and after handling soiled clothing or bedding
- Make sure that everyone has their own towel and that they do not use anybody else's
- Wash all soiled clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle that the manufacturer would recommend
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

Water Safety

- Do not use swimming pools (including hot tubs and paddling pools, etc.) if you have diarrhoea. You should wait until you have had no symptoms for 2 days
- Do not swim in water that may be contaminated
- Do not drink untreated water and avoid swallowing water when in lakes and swimming pools
- If your water supply is from a private water source please discuss this with the Environmental Health Department.

Travel Safety

Immunisation against hepatitis A is recommended if you are travelling to countries where the virus is common, particularly the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Central and South America, the Far East and Eastern Europe.

A blood test will show whether you are already immune to the hepatitis A virus.

A course of vaccinations is required to give full protection against the infection and should ideally be commenced 6 months before departure. Your GP/Travel Clinic will be able to offer you this.

Where can you get further advice?

If you would like any further advice about Hepatitis A infection or food hygiene, please contact your local Environmental Health Department. The local offices are listed below

Angus Council

Communities Department

Dewar House

12 Hill Terrace

Arbroath

DD11 1AH

Website: www.angus.gov.uk

Email: envhealth@angus.gov.uk



Tele: 01241 435600

Dundee City Council

Environmental Protection Division

Environment Department

3 City Square

Dundee

DD1 3BA

Website: www.dundee.gov.uk

Email: food.safety@dundee.gov.uk



Tele: 01382 433710

Perth & Kinross Council

Environmental and Consumer Services

Pullar House

35 Kinnoull Street

Perth

PH1 5GD

Website: www.pkc.gov.uk

Email: enquiries@pkc.gov.uk



Tele: 01738 476476

Other useful sources of information

The National Hand Washing Campaign

www.washyourhandsofthem.com

The Food Standards Agency

www.food.gov.uk

Travel and Immunisation Advice

www.fitfortravel.com

NHS 24

Tele: 111 - www.nhs24.com

NHS Tayside

Health Protection Team

Directorate of Public Health

Kings Cross

Cleington Road

Dundee

DD3 8EA

Website: www.taysidepublichealth.com



Tele: 01382 596976 or 596987

Further copies of this information are available or can be downloaded from the above NHS and local council. This information can be made available in Urdu, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, large print, Braille or audio tape. Information in other languages and formats can be made available on request. Contact NHS Tayside Communications Department on 01382 424138.