



## Hawaii State Department of Health

### Disease Investigation Branch

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## Hepatitis A

(Infectious Hepatitis)

### What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A (HAV) is a viral infection that causes inflammation of the liver.

### How do you get it?

HAV is spread from person to person by eating or drinking food or water that is contaminated with the stool of a person infected with the virus. The virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where good personal hygiene (hand washing) is not observed.

You can also become infected by close personal contact with an infected person, or by eating raw or undercooked shellfish (oysters, clams, etc.) taken from contaminated waters.

Casual contact, as in the work or school setting, does not spread the virus.

### What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

HAV ranges from a mild illness lasting 1 or 2 weeks, to a severe, disabling illness lasting for several weeks or more. The symptoms include the sudden onset of fever, stomach pain, loss of appetite, headache, tiredness, and vomiting. The urine may turn dark brown in color, followed several days later by yellow discoloration (jaundice) of the mucus membranes, skin, or whites of the eyes. Infants and young children with HAV tend to have milder or no symptoms and are less likely to develop jaundice than are older children and adults.

### When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually begin 4 weeks after infection with the virus, but the illness can begin in 2 to 7 weeks.

### For how long is a person contagious?

The contagious period begins 1 to 2 weeks before the symptoms start and lasts 2 weeks after the start of first symptoms.

### What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

There is no special treatment for persons with HAV.

### If you get hepatitis A once, can you get it again?

No. Once a person recovers from HAV, he or she cannot get it again.

### How can you keep from getting it?

Receiving the HAV vaccine is the best way to prevent the disease. HAV vaccine is licensed in the US for persons aged 2 and older. It is given in two doses, at least 6 months apart.

Immune globulin (IG) can be given as a shot for short term protection against HAV and is given to people who have been exposed to HAV, including household members, sexual partners and other close contacts of HAV infected people, to prevent them from becoming ill. IG must be given within

2 weeks after exposure to provide maximum protection.

### Other ways to prevent HAV include:

Carefully wash your hands after using the toilet or after changing diapers, and especially before preparing or eating food.

Do not drink from untreated water supplies.

When you are unsure of the level of cleanliness of a place serving food, order only cooked foods heated to a high temperature. The virus is killed by thorough cooking.

Avoid drinks containing ice and ice made with water suspected of being contaminated.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm>