

# Hepatitis



## What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. The liver plays a number of vital roles necessary to keep our body healthy.

## What are the causes?

Infectious hepatitis (the kind that is passed from one person to another through viruses) is called viral hepatitis. There are different forms of viral hepatitis. The most common types are A, B and C. There are also noninfectious causes of hepatitis, including exposure to substances such as alcohol, medications, and chemical poisons.

## What are the symptoms?

- Children usually don't show any symptoms.
- Adults often suffer from tiredness, appetite loss, nausea, fever, jaundice (yellowing of skin and whites of the eyes), and brown urine.

## How is hepatitis spread?

Hepatitis A is mainly spread through the fecal-oral route (e.g., placing in the mouth of hands, toys, food or drinks contaminated with the feces of an infected person). Symptoms appear 15-50 days after exposure. Persons with Hepatitis A are contagious one to two weeks before and one week after symptoms appear. Hepatitis B and C are spread through blood or other body fluids.

## How is hepatitis treated?

Hepatitis A goes away without treatment. Hepatitis B and C often become chronic diseases and while there are treatments, they are not always successful.

## Who is at risk?

*Hepatitis A:* Anyone who is not immunized against Hepatitis A can get it. However, anyone in a child care

setting is especially at risk, as are persons who travel to other countries where sanitation is poor, those having household and sexual contact with people suffering from hepatitis A, and those living in unclean conditions.

*Hepatitis B and C:* These are unusual in the child care setting. Persons in contact with other people's blood are at higher risk. These forms of hepatitis are also spread by infected mothers to newborn infants through blood exposure at birth. People with open sores can also contract the infection if they come in contact with the blood or body fluid of an infected person. There is an immunization against Hepatitis B. All children and child care providers should be immunized against Hepatitis B. There is no immunization for Hepatitis C.

## Ways to avoid hepatitis

- **Make sure that you and your children are immunized against Hepatitis A and B!** The hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for all children at age one year and a second dose should be given six months later. Those who have already had Hepatitis A cannot get sick from it and do not need the vaccine.
- Three Hepatitis B immunizations are required and given at birth, then at age 1-2 months, and again at 6 months.
- Clean up blood spills immediately. Wear latex gloves and wash your hands. Avoid contact with blood and body fluids.
- If you have open sores or cuts on the hands, wear latex gloves for changing diapers or cleaning wounds.
- Do not allow sharing of items which may be contaminated with blood or body fluids, such as toothbrushes, food or objects that may be mouthed.
- When children in diapers are using pools, use swim diapers. Notify the pool manager if a child has a leaky bowel movement.
- Discourage behavior which includes biting or scratching.

by A. Rahman Zamani, MD, MPH



**Provided by California Childcare Health Program**  
For more information, please contact:  
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