

HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis is a virus that inflames the liver. There are several viruses that can cause hepatitis, these include hepatitis A, B and C.



		<p>Woman's sexual organs (front)</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>1 Ovaries</td> <td>4 Cervix</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 Fallopian tubes</td> <td>5 Vagina</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 Womb</td> <td>6 Entrance to vagina</td> </tr> </table>	1 Ovaries	4 Cervix	2 Fallopian tubes	5 Vagina	3 Womb	6 Entrance to vagina						
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SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Some people may have no symptoms, but they can still pass on the virus. Symptoms may include:

- A short, flu-like illness.
- Fatigue.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Diarrhoea.
- Loss of appetite.
- Weight loss.
- Jaundice (yellow tinge to eyes and skin).
- Itchy skin.

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GETTING IT

The hepatitis A virus is found in faeces (poo) and can be passed on:

- If the virus comes into contact with a person's mouth through such things as rimming (where a person uses their mouth and tongue to stimulate another person's anus).
- Sexual contact.
- Through eating or drinking contaminated food or water or swimming near sewage outlets.

It is very important to wash your hands carefully after going to the toilet and before eating.

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Hepatitis A can be diagnosed by a simple blood test. If you have had hepatitis A but your body has cleared it, you may be protected from future infection with hepatitis A.

You will be most infectious before symptoms occur and may remain infectious for a few days afterwards. Infection is usually mild, but some people may need to be admitted to hospital.

If you test positive for hepatitis A it would be advisable to get your current sexual partner into the clinic for a check-up.

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IMMUNISATION

For certain high-risk groups vaccinations are available free of charge at the local sexual health (GUM) clinic. These are:

- Men who have sex with men.
- Intravenous drug users.
- Sex workers.

If you are travelling to a part of the world with high rates of hepatitis A, vaccinations are available from your GP, although there may be a charge for these.

A single injection of hepatitis A vaccine in the arm will give you protection for one year.

A second booster injection at 6-12 months will protect you for up to 20 years.

Also, if you have recently been in contact with someone with hepatitis A you may be offered something called immunoglobulin to try and stop you from being infected.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

There are rarely any long-term effects as the majority of people who are infected with Hepatitis A make a full recovery and develop lifelong immunity.

If you think you may have hepatitis A, contact your local sexual health (GUM) clinic and make an appointment. It's easy and completely confidential.

For more information on sexual health (including HIV), call the Sexual Health Line free (from the UK) on 0800 567 123, textphone (for people with hearing impairments) 0800 521 361 or phone your local NHS sexual health clinic.

You can also find out more about viral hepatitis from the British Liver Trust at info@britishlivertrust.org.uk or 0870 770 8028.