

Hepatitis Fact Sheet

What is Hepatitis A (HAV)?

Foodborne illness can be caused when contaminated water or food is eaten. “Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver and refers to a group of viral infections that affect the liver. Hepatitis A results from eating food or drinking water contaminated with the Hepatitis A virus (HAV).

What are the symptoms of HAV infection?

When symptoms of HAV are present, they can include the following:

- Fever
- Light-colored stool
- Nausea & vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Dark urine
- Loss of appetite
- Headache
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin or whites of the eyes)
- Diarrhea
- Joint pain
- Fatigue

Symptoms of illness usually start 4 weeks (15-50 days) after exposure. Some persons may have no symptoms (asymptomatic). In rare cases, the illness can cause severe liver damage, leading to death. Most people get better within 1 to 2 weeks, but a small number of individuals with HAV can relapse for up to 6 months afterward. Young children, the elderly, and people with weak immune systems are at especially high risk for HAV to progress to liver failure.

How is HAV spread?

People infected with HAV are most contagious before symptoms appear. HAV infections are commonly spread person-to-person through the fecal-oral route. This means that contaminated stool from an infected person is somehow ingested by another person. For example, if an infected person does not wash his or her hands after going to the restroom, the food he or she handles can become contaminated with HAV and spread to people who eat the food.

- Contaminated water, raw or undercooked shellfish, and salads are most often linked to food borne out breaks.
- Ready-to-eat foods like cold cuts and sandwiches, fruits and fruit juices, milk and milk products, vegetables, and iced beverages are also frequently involved in outbreaks.

HAV can also live outside the body for months on contaminated surfaces and under a wide range of conditions, including freezing, heat, chemicals, and dryness.

- HAV can be spread by hands or food touching contaminated surfaces (e.g., contaminated table tops, cooking utensils, or key boards).

Why is HAV important for child nutrition professionals?

People working with food who are sick with HAV can easily make others ill. A sick child nutrition employee can contaminate the food he or she is handling. Many of those eating the contaminated food may become ill, resulting in an outbreak. People infected with HAV are most contagious before symptoms appear.

Hepatitis Fact Sheet

How can HAV be prevented?

- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the restroom or changing diapers and before preparing or eating food.
- Avoid bare hand contact with ready-to-eat and ready-to-serve foods.
- Report symptoms of diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice, diagnosis of HAV, or exposure within the past 30 days to others with HAV to your manager and/or director. Do not work when you have these symptoms.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables under clean, running water.
- Ensure all food is purchased from a safe supplier.
- Prevent cross contamination in food preparation areas by thoroughly washing, rinsing, and sanitizing all food contact surfaces.
- Cook shellfish thoroughly, and use a thermometer to test for “doneness.”

Should I get vaccinated against HAV?

While people who work with food can be a source of foodborne outbreaks, vaccinations are not widely recommended. Your state and local health authorities may recommend vaccination of employees who work in areas where community-wide outbreaks are occurring.

This fact sheet is part of a series of six fact sheets on foodborne illness control and prevention.

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Viral Hepatitis, and National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. (2015). *Viral Hepatitis - Hepatitis A information*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HAV/index.htm>

Food and Drug Administration. (2012). *Bad bug book (second edition)*. Retrieved from <http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/CausesOfIllnessBadBugBook/>

Foodsafety.gov. *Hepatitis A*. Retrieved from <http://www.foodsafety.gov/poisoning/causes/bacteriaviruses/hepatitisa/index.html>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Services, Food and Drug Administration. (2017). *FDA food code*. Retrieved from <https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/ucm595139.htm>

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service through an agreement with the Institute of Child Nutrition at the University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

The University of Mississippi is an EEO/AA/TitleVI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA Employer.

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

© 2018, Institute of Child Nutrition, The University of Mississippi, School of Applied Sciences

Except as provided below, you may freely use the text and information contained in this document for non-profit or educational use with no cost to the participant for the training providing the following credit is included. These materials may not be incorporated into other websites or textbooks and may not be sold.

Suggested Reference Citation: Institute of Child Nutrition. (2018). *Hepatitis fact sheet*. University, MS: Author.

The photographs and images in this document may be owned by third parties and used by the University of Mississippi under a licensing agreement. The University cannot, therefore, grant permission to use these images. For more information, please contact helpdesk@theicn.org.