

Let's Talk ABOUT...

Hepatitis

Hepatitis is a disease that irritates the liver and causes it to swell. The disease can be mild or very severe. About half the people with hepatitis have no symptoms and may not know they have it.

How does a person get hepatitis?

Many different viruses cause hepatitis. Hepatitis viruses A, B, and C are common causes.

Hepatitis A

The virus that causes Hepatitis A, or infectious hepatitis, leaves the body in bowel movements. Someone can get the virus if they handle body wastes. Hepatitis A is most commonly seen among children in day-care centers, school-age children and young adults. Childcare facilities are particularly at risk because symptoms in children are milder than those in adults.

A pregnant woman with hepatitis can transmit the virus to her unborn baby through the placenta. The baby often does not show signs of hepatitis at birth or during infancy. Hepatitis A is most able to spread to another person during the first 1 to 3 weeks. This is before the person has symptoms.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B, or serum hepatitis, is passed from one person to another in blood or other body fluids. Persons of any age can be affected. A baby can get hepatitis B at birth, or before birth, from its mother. The virus can also be transmitted through semen. Sexual intercourse with a man or woman having Hepatitis B may give the partner the disease.

A hepatitis B infection may become chronic (long lasting), leading to cirrhosis (sir-oh-sis) which is a severe stage of liver disease. It may even lead to liver cancer. Children may become long-term hepatitis B carriers. This means that they won't have symptoms but may transmit it and infect other people for their entire lives.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is passed from one person to another in blood or other body fluids. People at high risk of getting hepatitis C include persons who have had blood transfusions, drug users who use needles, dialysis patients, or anyone having sexual contact with those persons. The period when hepatitis develops may last from 1 to 5 months. About half of the people with hepatitis C develop chronic liver disease.

What does hepatitis look like?

At first, someone with hepatitis may have a fever, lose their appetite, have nausea, be tired, and have an overall "bad feeling." These may be followed in a few days by dark urine, yellow eyes, yellow-looking skin, and stools that are light in color. These symptoms gradually disappear in 1 to 5 weeks. However, a person with hepatitis may continue to tire easily for several more weeks or possibly months. Some people do not develop any symptoms.

How do I prevent hepatitis?

The best and easiest way to prevent the disease is to practice good personal hygiene and cleanliness. Everyone, whether infected or not, should wash their hands before and after going to the toilet, preparing food, and before eating. Careful hand washing after diaper changes is very important.

If your child has been playing with another child who gets hepatitis, talk to your child's doctor. Children often place things in their mouths and do not wash their hands as often as they should. Find out how much contact your child had with the infected playmate. Exposure means repeated, close contact, such as between household members. Contacts at school, work, and visits to the home of an infected person are generally not enough to get hepatitis.

If your child has been exposed to hepatitis, he may be given a gamma globulin shot, so he doesn't get sick.

It prevents hepatitis if he hasn't received a hepatitis vaccine. If he is already sick with hepatitis, it doesn't work. Gamma globulin works best if it is given as soon as possible after exposure to hepatitis. If a child has hepatitis, all their household contacts and intimate playmates need gamma globulin, too. The gamma globulin is effective for only 2 to 6 weeks, so gamma globulin may be needed after every contact with hepatitis.

Hepatitis A

All babies should receive two doses of the hepatitis A (HAV) vaccines starting at one year old. These doses are

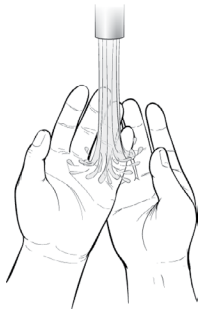
given six months apart. These will prevent hepatitis A infection.

Hepatitis B

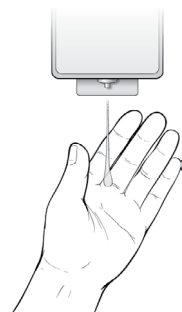
All babies should receive the hepatitis B virus (HBV) vaccines. This will prevent the hepatitis B infection and keep your child from becoming a long-term carrier of the virus. Vaccination starting at birth or soon after birth will protect your child against HBV through adulthood.

If the mother does not have Hepatitis B, babies receive the first dose at birth or by two months of age. They receive the second dose 1 to 3 months later and the

Hand washing with soap and water



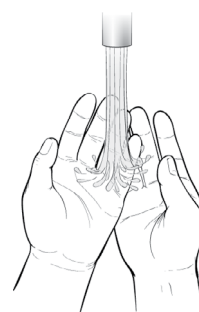
Wet hands with warm, running water.



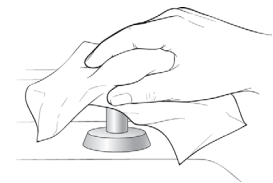
Apply liquid soap or use a clean bar of soap. Lather well.



Rub your hands together vigorously for at least 15 to 20 seconds. Be sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers.

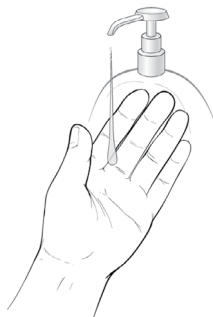


Rinse well. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.



Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

Hand washing with a hand-rub product

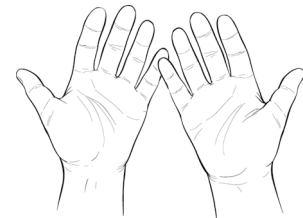


Use a product that contains at least 60% alcohol. Apply product to the palm of your hand. Read the product label to see how much to apply.



Be sure to cover all surfaces of your hands and fingers.

Rub your hands together until they are dry.



third dose between 6 and 18 months of age. If the mother is infected with HBV, talk to your doctor about the schedule.

How is hepatitis treated?

If you think your child has hepatitis, talk to your doctor. The doctor will perform a blood test. The test tells if your child has the disease and if treatment is needed.

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis. Usually, doctors recommend rest, a good diet, vitamins, and medicine that controls vomiting. If your child cannot keep liquids down, he may need to be admitted to the hospital.

What can I do at home for my child?

Diet

If your child is sick to his stomach, give him clear liquids such as Jell-O®, water, apple juice, 7-Up®. When he has no more stomach aches, offer your child small meals 5 to 6 times a day. In this way, he will eat more and will not get as tired.

Your child will need calories to keep up his strength and help his liver heal. Foods should be low in fat. Use skim or 2% milk, very little butter, trim away all fats from meats, and broil meat. Don't fry meats. Encourage your child to eat puddings made with skim milk, sherbet, Popsicles®, punch and non-chocolate candies. An adult with hepatitis should not drink alcoholic beverages for 6 months to a year after the illness. Alcohol is extremely hard on the liver.

Activity

At first your child will not feel like doing much. Gradually, his strength will return. Provide restful activities that encourage him to stay quiet. The liver must rest so it can return to normal. Once the jaundice (yellow skin) has faded, your child may feel well and

become active too soon. This causes stress on the liver, and the jaundice may return.

Return to school

After the jaundice is gone, make an appointment with your child's doctor. The doctor will check his blood to see if the liver is returning to normal. Your doctor will tell you when your child can return to school. Limit his activities. Emphasize hand washing before eating and before and after using the toilet.

Skin care

Jaundice may cause itching. This can be helped with Calamine® or any soothing lotion. Too much dryness can also cause itching. To prevent dryness, bathe your child with soap and water only when needed.

Cleanliness

Everyone in your family must thoroughly wash clothes and bed linen with soap. Everyone needs to wash his hands before eating or preparing food. Anyone touching your child's clothes or bed linen must wash his hands immediately afterwards. Do not share towels among family members.

What should you expect?

Having hepatitis in your family is no reason to panic or be overly upset. Children usually have much milder cases than adults and usually do not suffer any long-lasting effects. The disease is generally mild. The steps outlined above can prevent further spread of the disease. Teenagers with hepatitis may be worried that friends will think their disease is from drug abuse. You should reassure them and educate their friends about the real source of the infection.

If you have further questions, call your doctor or your local health department.