

## Hepatitis A Information Sheet

### What is Hepatitis A and how is it spread?

Hepatitis A is a serious and contagious liver disease caused by a virus. The disease can be mild or severe and can last anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Hepatitis A is spread through the feces (poop) of an infected person and is most contagious about 2 weeks before symptoms appear until about one week after jaundice appears. People can get sick with Hepatitis A through:

- Contaminated food/drinks (including water) or objects that are placed in the mouth
- Sexual contact
- Illegal drug use (whether the drugs are injected or not)
- Eating raw or undercooked shellfish (oysters, clams, mollusks, etc.)

### What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

Symptoms of hepatitis A usually begin 2 to 6 weeks after contact with the virus and may include:

- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin/eyes)
- Light or clay-colored stools
- Dark urine
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea, nausea, vomiting
- Abrupt or sudden fever

### How can you be treated for Hepatitis A?

There is no medical treatment for hepatitis A. People with hepatitis A should maintain good nutrition, get plenty of rest, and drink plenty of water. People may feel sick for a few months. Once a person recovers from hepatitis A, they cannot become infected with the virus again.

### How can you prevent Hepatitis A?

**The best way to prevent hepatitis A is by getting the hepatitis A vaccine.** Other prevention steps:

- Wash hands well before meals or handling food, and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- Practice food safety (wash fruits and vegetables, cook meats well, and prevent cross contamination)
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked shellfish.
- Only drink safe, treated water. Do not swallow water in pools, lakes, rivers, etc.
- Do not swim when you have diarrhea.
- Use extra caution when traveling to developing countries: “Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it!”
- If you are exposed to hepatitis A (and you have never received the vaccine or have never had Hepatitis A infection), get vaccinated within 2 weeks of exposure to prevent getting the illness.

### **IMPORTANT NOTES:**

- People who experience homelessness, unsteady housing, use drugs, or were recently incarcerated are at greater risk for hepatitis A and should get vaccinated.
- Infected adults should NOT work as food handlers, healthcare providers, or childcare workers until symptoms have stopped.
- Young children rarely show severe symptoms, but can still spread Hepatitis A. Infected children should NOT attend school or daycare until symptoms have stopped.

Updated June 2019