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# When Your Child Has Hepatitis A Virus (HAV)

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Many things can cause it. One cause is infection with the hepatitis A virus (HAV). This virus can spread through food or water. It can also spread from person to person through infected stool. For example, it spreads if a person doesn't wash their hands after using the bathroom or changing a dirty diaper. HAV often spreads in daycare facilities, restaurants, and places with poor sewage treatment. In most cases, the virus may cause mild flu-like symptoms. But it likely won't cause long-term problems.

## Symptoms of hepatitis A infection

Symptoms often appear about 2 to 6 weeks after contact with the virus. Symptoms are often mild in children. They can include:

- Pain in the upper right abdomen, where the liver is
- Tiredness and weakness
- Headache
- Sore muscles and joints
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes, dark yellow urine, or light-colored (gray- or clay-colored) stools (jaundice)
- Itchy skin
- Low-grade fever

## How is hepatitis A diagnosed?

The healthcare provider asks questions to find out how your child may have been exposed to HAV. The provider also does an exam. Hepatitis A can be confirmed with a simple blood test that detects antibodies to HAV.

## Treatment for hepatitis A infection

Hepatitis A goes away on its own. It may take several weeks or months. Symptoms are treated so your child is comfortable.

- Make sure your child gets plenty of rest.
- Give your child plenty of fluids. This is to help prevent dehydration. Good choices are water or an electrolyte drink for children. Moderate amounts of fruit juice are also OK.
- Check with your child's healthcare provider before giving your child any over-the-counter medicines. The liver processes all medicines. A child with hepatitis A may

not be able to take certain medicines.

## Preventing hepatitis A from spreading



A child with hepatitis A can spread the virus to others. This can happen even before symptoms appear. They can still spread the virus for a few days after symptoms start. Keep your sick child home from school or daycare until symptoms are gone.

Good handwashing helps prevent the spread of hepatitis A. Adults and children should wash hands often, and always after using the bathroom or changing diapers. Adults and children should also wash hands before preparing food or eating. To wash your hands or your child's hands, work up a good lather with soap and clean, running water. Scrub for at least 10 to 15 seconds, then rinse.

You should also have your child and others in the household vaccinated against viral hepatitis. The hepatitis A vaccine is safe for any adult or child older than age 1. Once a child has hepatitis A, they can't get it again, but could get another type of hepatitis. And getting vaccinated soon after exposure to HAV could prevent illness. Members of the household should be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B (another type of hepatitis virus), if they haven't been already. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C or the other less common types of hepatitis.

## Possible complications

In rare cases, hepatitis A can lead to a serious infection and liver failure. If a child has another liver problem, hepatitis A could make it worse. In most cases, though, hepatitis A does not cause any lasting problems in children.

## When to call your child's healthcare provider

Call the healthcare provider right away if your child has signs of a more serious problem, such as:

- Dehydration, which can show up as less urine, very dark urine, dry mouth, or no tears when crying
- Extreme irritability or drowsiness

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- Swelling in the hands, arms, feet, ankles, abdomen, or face
  - Bleeding from the nose, mouth, or rectum
  - Bloody stools
  - Easy bruising

## **Call 911**

Call 911 if your child loses consciousness.