

**HEPATITIS A**

Reportable to local or state health department

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver. It is the most common form of hepatitis infection in the United States. Among reported cases, the most frequent source of infection is household or sexual contact with a person who has hepatitis A, followed by attending or working in childcare settings, recent international travel, or connection with suspected food or waterborne outbreaks.

**CAUSE** Hepatitis A virus.

**SYMPTOMS** Usually starts suddenly with fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, and nausea. Dark (tea or cola-colored) urine, light-colored feces, and jaundice (yellowing of eyes or skin) may appear a few days later. Most children younger than 6 years of age, (70%) do not show symptoms. Older children and adults with hepatitis A usually have symptoms, often including jaundice.

**SPREAD** Hepatitis A viruses leave the body through the feces of an infected person and enter another person when hands, food, or objects (such as toys) contaminated with feces are placed in the mouth. Spread can occur either by person-to-person contact or when people do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing diapers and later prepare/handle food. Children may pass the virus to household members or childcare staff without ever having symptoms.

**INCUBATION** It takes from 15 to 50 days, usually about 28 days, from the time a person is exposed to the virus until symptoms begin.

**CONTAGIOUS PERIOD**

From 2 weeks before to 2 weeks after symptoms begin. Minimal risk one week after the onset of jaundice.

**EXCLUSION** Childcare and School: Consult with your local or state health department. Each situation must be looked at individually to decide if the person with hepatitis A can spread the virus to others.

**DIAGNOSIS** A blood test (Hepatitis A IgM antibody test) is done to determine whether there is recent or current infection.

**TREATMENT** No specific medication is given to the person with hepatitis A.

**PREVENTION/CONTROL**

- Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for all children 12 to 23 months of age and should be considered for groups at increased risk for hepatitis. Those persons include international travelers, men who have sex with men, illicit drug users, and persons with occupational risk. Vaccine should also be considered for those with chronic liver disease because they are at increased risk for severe problems.

**PREVENTION/CONTROL (CONTINUED)**

- **Regular and thorough hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet and changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. Staff should closely monitor or assist all children, as appropriate, with hand washing after children have used the bathroom or been diapered.
- Restrict students from sharing any communal food items that are brought from home. In the classroom, children should not serve themselves food items that are not individually wrapped. The teacher should hand out these items after washing his/her hands. (This is not intended to discourage family style serving in the absence of an outbreak).
- Clean and disinfect diapering area and potty chairs after each use and bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys when soiled and at least daily. (See pgs 35-41)
- Clean and sanitize mouthed objects and surfaces at least daily and when soiled. (See pgs 35-41)
- If there is a case of hepatitis A in a childcare or school, consult with the local or state health department. They will determine who has been exposed and make recommendations.