



Safety Talk



January 2020

Food Safety: Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a virus that can cause a liver infection. Symptoms can last a few days to several months. The virus is rarely fatal and most people develop lifetime immunity following infection. Hepatitis A can be serious; especially, for older people and those with chronic liver disease. For these individuals, there is a greater risk of complications. One common route of exposure can be food contaminated by infected food handlers. This can occur by directly handling already cooked or ready-to-eat foods with unclean bare hands or through food contact with dirty gloves.

Common symptoms of Hepatitis A include:

- Fever
- Stomach pain or discomfort
- Dark urine
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Clay or ash-coloured bowel movements
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes)

Anyone who believes they have been exposed to Hepatitis A should:

- Verify their vaccination records, and if not vaccinated, contact Public Health
- Monitor themselves for signs and symptoms of Hepatitis A infection
- Practice thorough handwashing
- Contact their health care provider if concerned

Symptoms of hepatitis A can begin 15 to 50 days after becoming infected. It is also possible to be infected and not have any symptoms. For people with symptoms, the severity of symptoms can range from mild to severe.

Hepatitis A can be avoided by:

- Not handling or preparing food for anyone if you are ill.
- Washing your hands often and thoroughly using soap and water. This is especially important after using the bathroom, changing a diaper and before preparing or eating food.
- If wearing gloves, change them often. Gloves cannot be washed and reused.
- Avoiding sharing common items such as cups and finger foods (for example, popcorn).
- Always washing fresh fruits and vegetables such as strawberries and lettuce.



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