HEPATITIS A *

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A (formerly know as infectious hepatitis) is a virus that causes infection of the liver. The disease is fairly common. Anyone can get Hepatitis A but is most common in children and young adults. Unlike Hepatitis B and C, the infection does not become long term or chronic.

How is it spread?

The Hepatitis A virus enters through the mouth, multiplies in the liver, and is passed in the stool. The virus is spread when an infected individual does not wash his/her hands after using the bathroom. The virus enters another person when hands, food, or objects contaminated with stool are put in the mouth. In some cases, it can be spread by consuming water or shellfish contaminated with sewage.
Hepatitis A virus is not normally spread to classroom contacts or work associates. It is not spread by kissing, sneezing or saliva.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The symptoms of Hepatitis A may include nausea, fatigue, poor appetite, fever, diarrhea and vomiting. Urine may become darker in color and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes) may appear. The disease is rarely fatal. Infants and young children tend to have very mild or no symptoms and are less likely to develop jaundice than are older children and adults. Not everyone who is infected will have all of the symptoms.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

Symptoms may appear two to six weeks after exposure, but usually between three to four weeks after exposure. The contagious period begins about two weeks before the symptoms appear and continues up to one week after onset of jaundice. Most people recover within three weeks without any complications.
Once an individual recovers from Hepatitis A, they are immune for life and do not continue to carry the virus.

How can Hepatitis A be prevented?

There is a Hepatitis A vaccine. It is recommended for all children between 12 to 23 months of age.
The two doses in the series should be administered at least six months apart. Children not fully vaccinated by age two can be vaccinated at subsequent visits. International travelers to regions with high rate of infections should also be vaccinated at least one month prior to departure. Persons with chronic liver disease should also be vaccinated.

The best prevention for all diseases that are transmitted through fecal-oral route is to wash your hands vigorously with soap and water especially:

After: Toilet visits; Handling soiled clothes or linens; Handling diapers (use glove); Cleaning up vomitus or diarrhea; Contact with a symptomatic person

Before: Eating, preparing food

It is recommended to use spray bottles to apply the disinfectant (1 part bleach to 9 part of cool water to be prepared daily) to contaminated surfaces such as toilets, sinks, floors, tables, water fountains or any areas where a sick individual has been.

What should I do about it?

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person once the symptoms appear. Generally, bed rest and a low fat diet is all that is needed. Avoid alcohol and check with your healthcare provider before taking any medicine.

This is a **reportable disease** to the Health Department. Children and sensitive workers can **NOT** be in school/daycare or any sensitive employment and need to be excluded for one (1) week after the onset of symptoms, or jaundice. Immune globulin (IG) may be given within 14 days of exposure to prevent persons at risk from becoming ill.

For more information, please contact the Santa Rosa County Health Department at 850-983-5200.

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH