

# HEPATITIS A (HAV) IN CHILDCARE/SCHOOL SETTINGS **FACT SHEET**

## What is hepatitis A infection?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A is an acute, viral infection that is spread by the fecal-oral route and is usually self-limited.

## How is hepatitis A spread?

Fecal-oral route: Contact with feces of children who are infected. This generally involves an infected child contaminating his/her own fingers, then touching an object that another child touches. The child who touched the contaminated surface then puts his/her fingers into his/her own mouth or another person's mouth.

## What are the signs or symptoms?

- Children younger than six years usually have few or no signs or symptoms. Symptoms are more common in older children and adults.
- Fever
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin or white of eyes)
- Abdominal discomfort
- Tiredness
- Dark-brown urine
- Loss of appetite, nausea
- Occasionally, diarrhea can occur.

## What are the incubation and contagious periods?

- Incubation period: 15 to 50 days, with an average of 28 days.
- Contagious period: Most infectious in the two weeks before onset of signs or

symptoms; the risk of transmission is minimal one week after onset of jaundice.

## How do you control it?

- Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for all children 12 months of age and older. The vaccine is given as two shots, six months apart. Both shots are needed for long-term protection.
- In an outbreak situation, vaccination for those not previously vaccinated is usually recommended. Occasionally, immune globulin may be suggested for contacts.
- Use good hand-hygiene technique at all times, especially after diaper changing.
- Childcare and school settings have been found to play a significant role in the community-wide spread of hepatitis A. Because young children usually have few or no signs and symptoms, spread within and outside a group care setting may occur before the initial case is recognized.

## What are the roles of the teacher/caregiver and the family?

- Report the infection to the staff member designated by the childcare program or school for decision-making and action related to care of ill children. That person in turn alerts possibly exposed family and staff members to watch for symptoms.
- Report the infection to the health department. If the health professional who makes the diagnosis does not inform the health department that the child who has the infection is a participant in a

childcare program or school, this could lead to a delay in controlling the spread.

- Contact a health professional and your local health department promptly to review the need for using vaccine or immune globulin for attendees and household member of attendees.
- Use good hand-hygiene technique at all times, with special attention after helping children with toileting or changing diapers.
- Teach children to wash their hands after using the toilet and before any activity that potentially involves food or the mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces in all areas. Hepatitis A virus can survive on surfaces for weeks.
- Routinely check that children complete hepatitis A vaccine series according to the most recent immunization recommendations.

### Exclude from group setting?

Yes.

- Children and adults, especially food handlers, with hepatitis A should be excluded for one week after onset of illness.
- Refer to health professional.

### Readmit to group setting?

- One week after onset of illness and after all contacts have received vaccine or immune globulin as recommended.
- When the child is able to participate and staff members determine that they can

care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

### Comments

- Once signs or symptoms of hepatitis A occur, the only treatment is comfort measures.
- For immune globulin to be effective, it should be given within two weeks of exposure. Your local health authorities should be notified as soon as possible. They can help ensure that all contacts have been notified and receive immune globulin or the hepatitis A vaccine.
- Outbreaks of hepatitis A infections in schools have been associated with home-prepared snacks that were served in schools. Any treat or snack served in a school or childcare setting should be commercially prepared and, ideally, individually wrapped.
- In childcare settings, the first sign of hepatitis A disease may be in adult caregivers (parents/guardians, staff members).
- Giving hepatitis A vaccine immediately following exposure is equally effective as giving immune globulin; furthermore, it will protect the person for a much longer time.

Source: Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 2013, American Academy of Pediatrics, [www.HealthyChildren.org](http://www.HealthyChildren.org)

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