

## Hepatitis A

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Hepatitis A is a viral infection and can cause inflammation of the liver.

It typically acquired through food or water contaminated by human faeces. Foods that grow close to the ground, such as strawberries and lettuce or shellfish, are particularly risky. Food handlers excreting Hepatitis A virus may contaminate foods if they do not observe proper hygiene measures.

It is also possible to contract the disease directly through close personal contact, in conditions of poor faecal hygiene. This mode of transmission may occur between children, and during certain sexual practices.

Countries with high burden of Hepatitis A disease include low income countries that may have poor sanitary conditions and hygiene practice.

### Signs and Symptoms:

After approximately 28 days, patients can feel unwell, off their food, sick and feverish before developing jaundice (yellow skin). Recovery usually takes on average a month in young people, but some patients are ill for some months. Complications of the disease are more likely in those with pre-existing liver disease.

Children with Hepatitis A often do not show any symptoms, and less than 10% of those under the age of 6 years develop jaundice. However, the disease becomes much more serious with advancing age.

Vaccines are available for those travelling to endemic areas.

1 vaccine dose protects you for 1 year and a further dose protects for at least 25 years in those who are well. However, the vaccine should not be an alternative to food and water hygiene precautions and ensuring good personal hygiene.

### Food and water precautions:

#### Water:

- Boil water or use bottled water (ideally fizzy and check that the seal is intact) Beware of fake bottled water.
- Chemical disinfectants may be used; remember water may need filtering. Filtration bottles are available. Seek advice on how to use these products
- Clean teeth with boiled, bottled or treated water
- Hot drinks, bottled and canned drinks are generally safe
- Avoid swallowing water in the swimming pool, bath or shower
- Avoid ice in drinks

#### Food:

- Wash hands before eating or handling foods.
- Choose to eat freshly cooked hot (temperature hot), food.
- Peel fruit and vegetables and wash in bottled or treated water.
- Avoid reheated or food left standing
- Food bought from street vendors can be risky.
- High risk foods include shellfish, salads, mayonnaise and other dishes containing uncooked egg. Also, unpasteurised products such as milk, cheese and ice cream.

**BOIL IT, COOK IT, PEEL IT OR LEAVE IT**

Further information can be found at:

<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/21/hepatitis-a>

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