

SYMPTOMS

Hepatitis A is a viral infection targeting the liver, spread mainly through the faeco-oral route, similar to Hepatitis E. Once within the body, the virus causes liver inflammation, and is associated with poor sanitary living conditions. Symptoms usually appear two to four weeks after exposure, and can range from mild to severe. Such infection cannot lead to chronic liver disease, unlike other hepatitis viruses ^[1].

General symptoms:

- Fever and fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal Pain

Specific symptoms:

- Dark urine
- Pale stools
- Yellowing of skin and sclera

In case of the more severe, fulminant infection, acute liver failure may develop – this being potentially fatal ^[2].



TRANSMISSION

Distribution and Spread

Hepatitis A is primarily spread through faecal-oral transmission, where viral particles in faeces can contaminate food or water sources, causing infection. Note that this means it can also be transmitted through anal-oral sex, however not through casual contact with an infected person ^[2]. Intravenous drug abusers and male-male intercourse partners, are at higher risk of infection. Note also that once recovered, a person will have lifelong immunity, preventing any future hepatitis A re-infection ^[1].

RECOMMENDATION

Treatment

Antiviral therapy is not available for hepatitis A infection, with most cases resolving on their own within three to six months ^[3]. Treatment is instead supportive, including rest, adequate hydration and nutrition, and possible drug symptomatic relief. In severe cases, hospitalization may be necessary to manage any possible liver failure.

Prevention

Infection is best prevented through vaccination, with a vaccine being available for anyone above the age of one, being recommended based on lifestyle risk and travel risk, as well as for chronic liver disease patients ^[3]. Other important precautionary measures include:

- Frequent hand washing, using hot water and soap, especially after using the bathroom
- Avoid uncooked foods, unclean fruits/vegetables and raw shellfish
- Ensure safe water sources, otherwise use bottled/boiled water
- Practicing safe sex using condoms or dams
- Avoiding sharing needles or other injection drug equipment

1. Hepatitis A Questions and Answers for Health Professionals [Internet]. 2019. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/havfaq.htm> (accessed March 19, 2023).
2. Hepatitis A [Internet]. World Health Organization: WHO; 2022. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-a> (accessed March 19, 2023).
3. Overview - Hepatitis A [Internet]. NHS. 2019. Available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis-a/> (accessed March 19, 2023).