



### What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus which causes your liver to become swollen and tender.

### What are the symptoms?

After the virus enters the body, there are no symptoms for two to six weeks. Some people, particularly young children, may only have a mild illness. They may not know they are infected although they can pass on the virus to others. A few people, especially the elderly, develop a serious illness and need to be looked after in hospital.

General symptoms are often mistakenly diagnosed as flu (tiredness, aches and pains, a fever and/or loss of appetite). You may also experience sickness, stomach ache and/or diarrhoea. These symptoms may last for a week or more. Then **jaundice** may develop. Jaundice is easily noticeable because the whites of the eyes go yellow, and in more serious cases the skin goes yellow, urine may turn dark and bowel motions become pale.

It will take a while to recover from hepatitis A. Most people feel better within a few weeks although they may feel tired and lack energy for many more months. Once you have recovered, you will never be infected with hepatitis A again. Unlike other hepatitis viruses, Hepatitis A does not cause long-term liver damage.

### How is Hepatitis A passed on?

Hepatitis A is passed from person to person by eating food or drinking water contaminated with the virus. Fruit, vegetables and uncooked food washed in contaminated water can cause infection, especially in hot countries. Shellfish can be infected if it comes from sea contaminated with sewage. Cooked food is safe but can be contaminated if it has been handled by someone with the virus. The virus is passed out in the bowel motions of an infected person. The illness can spread easily within families and where people live closely together. It can also be caught after caring for infected people.

### Why is the vaccine being offered?

When a single case of hepatitis A occurs in a school, efforts are made to identify the source of infection. If no obvious source is found (history of foreign travel or contact with a person known to be infected) then it is possible that the infection has been passed on by someone who does not have any symptoms. It is therefore recommended that vaccine be offered to all children and adults who have been in close contact with the identified case to prevent the infection spreading further.

### Do pregnant women need the vaccine?

Pregnant women are not at any greater risk from Hepatitis A infection than the general population. The vaccine is safe to be given to pregnant women and those

who are breast-feeding. However, if you are concerned please speak to your midwife or GP.

### **What if my child has already had the vaccine?**

If your child has been vaccinated within the last 6 months (e.g. in order to travel abroad<sup>1</sup> or those who have chronic liver disease, pre-existing chronic hepatitis B or C infection or HIV infection or immunosuppression) they do not need to be vaccinated at this time. However it is recommended that they receive a booster dose of hepatitis A vaccine six to 12 months after the initial dose.

### **What health reasons are there not to have the vaccine?**

There are very few individuals who cannot receive hepatitis A-containing vaccines. Minor illnesses without fever or systemic upset are not valid reasons to postpone immunisation.

The vaccine should not be given to anyone who:

- has had a confirmed anaphylactic (“allergic”) reaction to a previous dose of a hepatitis A-containing vaccine, or
- has had a confirmed anaphylactic (“allergic”) reaction to any component of the vaccine.
- is acutely unwell, e.g. with fever, for whom immunisation may be postponed until they have fully recovered (please follow up with your GP)..

### **Is a booster required?**

A booster dose of hepatitis A vaccine should be given at six to 12 months after the initial dose. Please ensure you follow up with your GP for the booster.

### **How to prevent further cases?**

The most important way of ensuring that it is not passed on to other people is by maintaining personal hygiene so that other people do not come into contact with the virus in your faeces. This means that you must make sure that your **hands are washed thoroughly**

- After going to the toilet
- Before preparing and eating meals
- After dealing with sick people, their clothing/bedding
- After dealing with soiled nappies/clothing

### **Who can I call if I need additional information?**

Your GP or NHS 111

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<sup>1</sup> Hepatitis A vaccine is a recommended travel vaccine for some countries so your child may have already had the vaccine. Hepatitis A is more common in countries outside Northern and Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The highest risk areas for UK travellers are the Indian subcontinent and the Far East, but the risk extends to Eastern Europe.