

# HEPATITIS A



## Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is an infection that attacks the liver caused by the Hepatitis A virus (HAV). This virus, one of several liver targeting viruses, causes the liver to become inflamed and irritated, thus affecting your liver's ability to function properly. It is very contagious and good hygiene such as frequent hand washing should be practiced to avoid spreading the virus to other people. A large portion of people infected with the virus have no symptoms at all, especially children. Mild cases do not require any treatment and patients recover on their own. This virus does not lead to permanent scarring of the liver or cirrhosis but it can, in very rare instances, lead to acute liver failure.



*Mission Statement* - The Community Liver Alliance is dedicated to supporting the community through liver disease awareness, prevention, education and research.

For more information please visit our website  
[www.communityliveralliance.org](http://www.communityliveralliance.org)

### Or Contact Us

100 W Station Square Drive, Suite 212  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

**412-501-3252**

**[support@communityliveralliance.org](mailto:support@communityliveralliance.org)**

# HEPATITIS A

**Facts & Information**  
**Preventive Measures**  
**Treatment Options**



[www.communityliveralliance.org](http://www.communityliveralliance.org)



## What is your liver and what does it do?

The liver is a large reddish-brown solid organ that is approximately 3 to 4 pounds. Located in the upper part of the abdomen, it is tucked away under the right side of the rib cage. It is one of the largest organs in the body, second only to the skin. It is shaped like a pyramid and is divided into the right and left lobes.

The liver is a unique organ that performs many complex functions in your body every day. It acts as a filter to clean and clear your body of waste, thus helping your body fight infection. The liver is like a big chemical laboratory. It manages the nutrients that have been absorbed by the gut from food, removes toxins from the blood, makes big proteins like albumin and clotting factors (these help our blood clot), and secretes bile which helps digest our food.

## Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms usually appear suddenly about 2-4 weeks after a person has been infected. Initial symptoms include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, little to no appetite, low grade fever, and pain over the site of your liver. Dark urine, light stools, yellowing of the skin and eyes, and itching develop later. Symptoms usually last 6-8 weeks but can go on as long as 6 months.

## How does one get Hepatitis A?

People become infected with Hepatitis A when they eat or drink something contaminated with the virus or they come into direct contact with an infectious person. Individuals are infectious even before they start to have symptoms. The virus is shed in the stool and people become infected when they ingest something that has any amount of fecal matter on it. HAV often affects areas of poor sanitation and overcrowding. Common sources of major outbreaks are water and restaurants.

## Who is at risk?

People at risk for developing HAV are those that:

- Travel to areas where HAV is common
- Live in a household or have a significant other who is actively infected with HAV
- Use IV drugs
- Men who have sexual contact with other men

## How is it diagnosed?

Hepatitis A Virus is diagnosed through a simple blood test obtained by your doctor.

## Treatment

There is no specific treatment for the virus as the body clears the virus on its own with time. The best thing you can do to get better is to get plenty of rest, drink enough fluids, eat a healthy diet, and avoid alcohol. Sexual activity and preparing foods should be avoided as to not expose others to the virus. Talk to your doctor before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medications during this time.

## Prevention

Maintaining good hygiene is the best way to prevent infection. Always wash your hands immediately before touching food and after using the bathroom. Wash fruits and vegetables well before eating them. Wash hands, knives, and surfaces well after handling raw meats or seafood. It is very important that you follow these practices if you or if someone you live with is infected with HAV. Do not share towels, eating utensils, or toothbrushes. When traveling, drink bottled water and use it to brush your teeth.

A vaccine to protect against Hepatitis A is available through your doctor's office or county health department to prevent hepatitis A infection. Children, people who are risk for becoming infected HAV, and those with a chronic liver disease should consider getting the vaccine.