

HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter
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Hepatitis A

Introduction

In the United States, outbreaks of hepatitis A are rare due to awareness of personal hygiene and chlorination of our water supply. However, a recent local outbreak of Hepatitis A has left many concerned. According to the Arkansas Department of Health, there have been 100 cases reported since February of this year with most reported in the northeast Arkansas area, particularly Clay, Green, and Craighead Counties. So, what is hepatitis? What are the differences between A, B, and C? How is it transmitted? What are the risks? How can it be prevented?

Hepatitis A, B, and C

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver and can be caused by the various forms of the hepatitis viruses: mainly A, B, and C. According to the CDC, hepatitis is a viral liver infection that is contagious

and transmitted in different ways depending on the strain of the virus. What are the differences between the viruses?

- Hepatitis A can last from a few weeks to months while B and C can be lifelong.
- Hepatitis A is spread via fecal-oral route while B and C are primarily spread through blood or bodily fluids.
- Hepatitis A and B have an effective vaccine available but there is currently no vaccine available for hepatitis C.

Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of hepatitis A can present abruptly and, according to the CDC, can include:

- Fatigue
- Fever
- Nausea and vomiting

- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored stools
- Joint pain
- Jaundice
 - Yellowing of skin/eyes

Symptoms usually do not present until 4 weeks after exposure. However, they can present as early as 2 weeks after or as late as 7 weeks post-exposure and usually develop over the course of several days. This is concerning, because you may not know you have been exposed and can infect others during this time. It is also important to know that most children under the age of 6 do not show symptoms.

How serious is it? Severity can range from short-term, mild illness to severe illness lasting several months. According to the CDC, most people feel sick for several

weeks but recover completely without lasting liver damage. Symptoms of hepatitis A usually remain less than 2 months but can last up to 6 months. In rare cases, it can cause liver failure and death. However, this is more common in those older than 50 with pre-existing liver disease.

Transmission and Risks

Hepatitis A is highly contagious. According to the CDC, it is usually spread when someone “unknowingly ingests the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated by small, undetected amounts of stool from an infected person.” It can also be spread through close personal contact with someone infected. The virus can survive outside of the body for months. It is also important to know that high cooking temperatures can kill the virus, but freezing temperatures do not.

Who is at risk? According to the CDC, certain groups are at a higher risk for contraction of the hepatitis A virus, including:

- People in direct contact with or provide care to someone with hepatitis A
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common

- IV drug users
- People with clotting factor disorders

Treatment and Prevention

Treatment for hepatitis A focuses on treating the symptoms of the infection. Similar to other illnesses, it is usually comprised of rest, fluids, and good nutrition. If symptoms are severe enough, some may seek care in a hospital.

Hepatitis A can easily be prevented by receiving a vaccination or series of vaccinations and practicing good hygiene. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom and changing diapers and before preparing any food.

What are the options as far as vaccinations? The CDC recommends either the hepatitis A vaccine or the combination A and B vaccine. The hepatitis A vaccine is a series of 2 shots, 6 months apart that provide lasting prevention. The combination hepatitis A and B vaccination is a series of 3-4 vaccinations in varying intervals based on the patient. Most college-age adults have been vaccinated with the combination in order to attend school. However, that is not always the case. Consult your pharmacist or primary care physician about the vaccinations. They or the health department can access

your shot record and tell you if you need the vaccine.

If you think you may have been exposed, contact your doctor or the local department of health. According to the Arkansas Department of Health, a person can effectively prevent getting hepatitis A if he or she receives the vaccine within 2 weeks of exposure.

References

- <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hepa/public/index.html>
- <http://www.immunize.org/c-atq.d/p2081.pdf>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/afaq.htm#A2>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/abc/index.htm>
- <https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/hepatitis-a>

Other News:

**If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Katie Sellers, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.