

Hepatitis A

In 2019, the DHHS Division of Public Health Services' (DPHS) Bureau of Infectious Disease Control continues to see a marked increase of Hepatitis A cases in New Hampshire. Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A is a vaccine preventable disease.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis A virus is passed out of the body in the stool and is spread by the fecal-oral route, just like infectious diarrhea. Contact with stool-contaminated food, drink or environment surfaces (e.g., toilet seat, changing table) can spread the infection.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms vary greatly, ranging from none at all to severe illness. Early symptoms can include loss of appetite, nausea, aching, fever, and stomachache. Later signs can include dark colored urine, light colored stools and jaundice (i.e., yellowing of white of eyes, eyes or skin). (Note: jaundice occurs more often among adults than children). These symptoms usually last from one to two weeks, although some adults may be sick for several months.

Can a person have this disease without knowing it?

Yes. This is especially important in the childcare setting because most young children with hepatitis A do not become ill. Children with hepatitis A without symptoms who are in diapers could easily pass the virus to unsuspecting childcare facility staff and family members.

In addition, people with hepatitis A are most likely to spread the disease to others during a period extending from 14 days before developing symptoms to one week after symptoms develop. This means that a person may be infectious to others before even realizing he or she is ill.

How can the spread of this disease be prevented?

1. The most effective way to prevent the spread of Hepatitis A is to be vaccinated.
Hepatitis A vaccine is *recommended* for children 12-23 months. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), recommends immunizing children against Hepatitis A.
2. The two dose series should be given at 12 and 18 months of age. Children who are not vaccinated by age 2 years can be vaccinated at subsequent visits.
3. Wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet.
4. Wash hands thoroughly after diapering children.
5. Wash hands thoroughly before preparing food.
6. Clean toilet facilities thoroughly and wash hands afterward.
7. Discourage children from putting non-food items into their mouths since these items may be a source of the virus.

Who should be excluded?

Persons with hepatitis A (or suspected hepatitis A) should be excluded from daycare centers, food-handling occupations, and direct care of hospitalized and institutionalized patients for one week after the onset of symptoms (jaundice) or hepatitis A has been ruled out. A Public Health Professional will advise individuals regarding specific recommendations.

Reportable?

Yes, hepatitis A is reportable by New Hampshire law to the Division of Public Health Services, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at (603) 271-4496.

It is important that cases associated with a childcare center be reported as soon as possible. A Public Health Professional will give specific recommendations.

Content source: Disease Handbook for Childcare Providers REVISED –January 2018

For more about the State of NH Hepatitis A Outbreak please visit:

<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/hepatitisa/hepa-nh.htm>

If you have parents or staff members that wish to learn more vaccines, please visit:

<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/immunization/index.htm>