

## HEPATITIS A

**Hepatitis A** is a fairly common liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. A vaccine for hepatitis is available.

**SYMPTOMS:** With hepatitis A there is a sudden onset of fever, fatigue, nausea, lack of appetite, diarrhea and abdominal discomfort. This may be followed in a few days by yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice), light colored stools (bowel movements) and dark urine. Many infections may be mild without symptoms (or without jaundice) especially in children. Although complete recovery without consequences or recurrences is the rule, recovery may be prolonged.

**DIAGNOSIS:** Diagnosis is based on physical examination and a history of exposure to a person with the disease. The disease is confirmed by a blood test that shows the presence of antibodies specific for hepatitis A.

**TRANSMISSION:** The hepatitis A virus enters through the mouth, multiplies in the body and is passed in the stool. If careful hand washing with soap is not done, the virus can be carried on the infected person's hands and spread by direct contact or by consuming food or drink that has been handled by that individual. In some cases, it can be spread by consuming water contaminated with improperly treated sewage. Once infected, the person is capable of spreading the virus from two weeks before he becomes ill until ten days after the onset of symptoms. In most cases, the person is no longer contagious one week after the onset of jaundice. Symptoms usually occur around thirty days after exposure to a person with hepatitis A, but may occur as early as fifteen days or as late as fifty days after exposure. **Normally, hepatitis A is not spread to individuals having usual working or school classroom contact.**

**TREATMENT:**

- There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A except bed rest.
- A person with confirmed hepatitis A should not handle food and should use good hygiene especially after using the bathroom.
- Household members and close personal contacts may be given an injection of immune globulin (antibodies which decrease the chance of becoming ill) if it has been less than two weeks from the last exposure. **Immune globulin is not recommended for individuals having normal working or school classroom contact.**

**SCHOOL IMPLICATIONS:**

- Use good hygiene after using the toilet: dispose of tissue in toilet and wash hands thoroughly with soap under running water for at least 15 seconds.
- Wash hands thoroughly before eating.
- Do not share drinking/eating utensils or food.