

Hepatitis A

Information for patients from the Infection Prevention and Control Team

You have been given this leaflet as you have been found to have the **Hepatitis A** virus in your stool.

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis is a general term referring to inflammation of the liver. There are five different types of hepatitis. Hepatitis A is an infection caused by a virus. The incubation period (time between becoming infected and becoming ill) can vary between two to six weeks.

It is quite rare in the UK, and is more often linked with travel to foreign countries. It is often a cause of foodborne outbreaks of illness. Following infection patients will have life-long immunity.

How do you catch Hepatitis A?

- The virus is found in the stools (bowel motions) of an infected person. It can get on to a person's hands who has gone to the toilet and not washed their hands afterwards. This allows the virus to spread by hand to hand contact.
- Sometimes eating contaminated food such as shellfish may be the cause.
- It can also be spread through contact with blood (see the next page for more information).

Who can get it?

Anyone who is not immune can get Hepatitis A.

Most cases happen in children, but adults can be affected if they have not had the illness before.



What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?

Often there are no symptoms at all.

- Some patients may have a mild tummy upset, which soon goes.
- Many patients become jaundiced (a yellow appearance), and develop sickness and diarrhoea or feel generally unwell.
- Often the colour of the patient's urine darkens and their stools are pale.

The virus is in a person's stools for up to two weeks before they show any illness at all.

What happens if I get Hepatitis A?

You will get better. It might take a few weeks before getting back to normal, but the more severe symptoms usually start to go quite quickly.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment. Normally all you need to do is make sure you keep hydrated by drinking plenty of water, get lots of bed rest, and take it easy until you feel better.

How can it be prevented?

The most important way of preventing Hepatitis A is by strict attention to hand washing, particularly after going to the toilet. To reduce the risk of spreading infection, people should not share towels.

How long is someone infectious?

Patients can be infectious from a few weeks before they show any symptoms, to a few days after developing jaundice.

Is this infection caught from blood?

Hepatitis A is only occasionally caught through contact with blood. It is Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C that are commonly caught from contact with blood and cause different signs and symptoms.

Is there a vaccine?

Yes, but this is only recommended for those who travel to countries where Hepatitis A is common, and for close family members of a patient with Hepatitis A.

Why am I nursed in a single room?

Single rooms help to prevent the spread of Hepatitis A to other vulnerable patients on the ward. You will need to be in a sideroom for one week after developing jaundice. The risk of spread is also greatly reduced by thorough washing and drying of hands by staff and visitors.

All visitors should see the nurse-in-charge before visiting for advice. However, we do advise all visitors wash their hands with soap and water and dry them thoroughly when leaving the isolation room/ward.

What will happen at home?

You may be discharged home whilst still jaundiced or within a week of developing jaundice, if your doctors feel you are well enough. Please do not worry; the precautions taken in hospital are aimed at preventing the spread of infection to other ill and vulnerable patients.

The most important thing you and your family can do is make sure you continue with good personal hygiene, such as hand washing, especially after using the toilet or before preparing food.

Hepatitis A has to be reported to **Public Health England**, who are responsible for the health of the general public. Someone from Public Health England may ring you to speak to you, to ask you some questions. Please do not be concerned, this is routine.

Further Information

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to either the nurse-in-charge of the ward or the matron. If they are unable to help you or you need further information, please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on:

- **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM) Hospital**, Margate
Telephone: 01843 22 55 44 extension 725-3625
- **Kent and Canterbury Hospital**, Canterbury
Telephone: 01227 86 40 49
- **William Harvey Hospital**, Ashford
Telephone: 01233 63 33 31 extension 723-8202 or 723-8198

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation