



Hepatitis A

Information for patients from Infection Prevention and Control

You have been given this leaflet as we have found that you have the **Hepatitis A** virus in your stool (poo). This leaflet explains:

- what Hepatitis A is
- how you can catch the virus
- what the symptoms are; and
- how it can be treated.

We hope the leaflet will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team.

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis is a general term that refers to inflammation of the liver. There are five different types of hepatitis. Hepatitis A is an infection caused by a virus. The incubation period can vary between 2 to 6 weeks. The incubation period is the time between becoming infected and becoming ill.

Hepatitis A 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 did I catch Hepatitis A?

The virus is found in the stools (poo) 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 **Is this infection caught by blood?** below).

Who can get it?

Anyone who is not immune to the virus can get Hepatitis A.

Most cases happen in children, but it can also affect adults 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). They also 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 2 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 thoroughly washing your hands, 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 the following individuals.

- People who travel to countries where Hepatitis A is common.
- Close family members of a patient with Hepatitis A.
- People with chronic liver disease.
- People with haemophilia.
- Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM).
- People who inject drugs.
- Individuals at risk due to their job.

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 side room for 1 week after developing jaundice. The risk of spreading Hepatitis A is also greatly reduced by staff and visitors thoroughly washing and drying their hands.

All visitors should see the nurse-in-charge for advice before visiting you. All visitors must also wash their hands with soap and water and dry them thoroughly when leaving the isolation room / ward.

What will happen at home?

If your doctors feel you are well enough, you may be discharged home whilst still jaundiced or within a week of developing jaundice. 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. This includes hand washing, especially after using the toilet or before preparing food.

Hepatitis A has to be reported to the **UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)**, who are responsible for the health of the general public. Someone from UKHSA may ring 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:

- **Kent and Canterbury Hospital**, Canterbury
Telephone: 01227 766877 extension 722-4216 or 722-6810
- **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM) Hospital**, Margate
Telephone: 01843 225544 extension 725-3625 or 725-4234

- **William Harvey Hospital**, Ashford
Telephone: 01233 633331 extension 723-8202 or 723-8198

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.

Please let us know:

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

You can let us know this by:

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email (ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net).

Patients should not bring 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 has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient information leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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