

# Hepatitis A

## What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. Heavy alcohol use, some medications, toxins, and certain medical conditions can cause hepatitis.

Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. Although all types of viral hepatitis can cause similar symptoms, they are spread in different ways, have different treatments, and some are more serious than others.

### Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A can be prevented with a vaccine. People who get hepatitis A may feel sick for a few weeks to several months but usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage.

In rare cases, hepatitis A can cause liver failure and even death; this is more common in older people and in people with other serious health issues, such as chronic liver disease.

## How common is hepatitis A?

Since the hepatitis A vaccine was first recommended in 1996, cases of hepatitis A in the United States have declined dramatically. Unfortunately, in recent years the number of people infected has been increasing because there have been multiple outbreaks of hepatitis A in the United States. These outbreaks have primarily been from person-to-person contact, especially among people who use drugs, people experiencing homelessness, and men who have sex with men.

## How is hepatitis A spread?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool and blood of people who are infected. The hepatitis A virus is spread when someone ingests the virus, usually through:

### → Person-to-person contact

Hepatitis A can be spread from close, personal contact with an infected person, such as through having sex, caring for someone who is ill, or using drugs with others. Hepatitis A is very contagious, and people can even spread the virus before they feel sick.

### → Eating contaminated food or drink

Contamination of food with the hepatitis A virus can happen at any point: growing, harvesting, processing, handling, and even after cooking. Contamination of food and water happens more often in countries where hepatitis A is common. Although uncommon, foodborne outbreaks have occurred in the United States from people eating contaminated fresh and frozen imported food products.

**Hepatitis A can be prevented with a safe and effective vaccine.**



