PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Hepatitis A and Food Handlers

What is Hepatitis A?
Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by a virus and is a contagious liver disease. The disease is mild in children, but can be more severe in adults and can cause infected individuals to miss up to 6 weeks of work.

How is Hepatitis A spread?
Hepatitis A is spread when the virus is taken in by a person who has not had Hepatitis A before or is not immunized against Hepatitis A by mouth — even in microscopic amounts — from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the feces, or stool, of an infected person. Infected food handlers may carry the virus on their hands and may contaminate ready-to-eat food when they do not use good hand washing practices after every restroom visit and have bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?
- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- Jaundice (a yellowing of skin or eyes)
- Fatigue
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Loss of appetite
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Joint pain

Is there a test for Hepatitis A?
A blood test can be done to find out if a person is infected with Hepatitis A.

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?
On average, symptoms occur 2-6 weeks after exposure. Symptoms usually develop over a period of several days.

How long is a person contagious?
Most people are contagious for one to two weeks before the start of the first symptoms and up to one week after the symptoms first appear. Therefore, an infected person may potentially shed Hepatitis A virus for almost one month.

Is there a treatment for Hepatitis A?
There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A infection. However, it is important to have a doctor follow the course of the infection. The doctor can recommend measures such as rest, change in diet, fluids, etc. Check with health care provider before taking medication, which can potentially damage...
the liver. Once recovered, a person cannot spread the disease further. They are immune for life and cannot be infected with Hepatitis A again.

**Are food handlers at higher risk for Hepatitis A?**
Food handlers are not at higher risk than other persons for becoming infected with Hepatitis A. However, infected food handlers are at higher public health risk for spreading Hepatitis A to others.

**How can food handlers prevent the spread Hepatitis A?**
1. Food handlers should never work while ill with fever, nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, or diarrhea. If a food handler is experiencing any of these symptoms, he/she should immediately stop working, inform the managers, and seek medical care.
2. Good sanitation and good hygiene are key to preventing Hepatitis A. Specifically, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:
   - before eating or preparing food
   - after using the bathroom
3. Food handlers should not have bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food. If gloves are used, hands must be washed before putting on gloves. Gloves should be used for only one task and then discarded. Gloves should also be replaced with clean gloves whenever food preparation has been interrupted.
   **NOTE:** Glove usage does not replace the need for good hand washing practices.
4. There is a vaccine available that will prevent Hepatitis A infection and can be used to prevent infection in food handlers. After exposure to Hepatitis A there are shots that may prevent the disease if given within two weeks of exposure.

**What should be done for co-workers of a food handler infected with Hepatitis A?**
Co-workers who worked the same days and shifts of a food handler infected with Hepatitis A, should not be allowed to handle food until they receive a shot of immune globulin (IG) or Hepatitis A vaccine or show proof of previous infection or previous vaccination. The co-workers may return to food handling if they receive IG or provide proof of immunity and are not experiencing any symptoms. If the co-workers refuse IG, they are not allowed to handle food for 50 days starting from their last exposure.

**If a person receives Immune globulin (IG), is this person immune for life?**
No. IG protects a person who has not been infected with hepatitis A for up to 3 months. IG provides protection if it is given before exposure to the Hepatitis A virus or if it is given within 14 days of exposure to the virus. However, getting IG does not guarantee complete protection against Hepatitis A, especially if a person has been exposed to the virus multiple times. IG may make the symptoms milder in a person already infected with Hepatitis A.

**Are there any health regulations for food handlers infected with Hepatitis A?**
Yes. To protect the public’s health, food handlers infected with Hepatitis A cannot handle food until 2 weeks after they started having symptoms.

**For more information on Hepatitis A, call (816) 325-7204**

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