Hepatitis A (HAV)

What is Hepatitis A?
Hepatitis A is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis A virus. Illness can range from mild illness lasting a few weeks to severe illness lasting several months. Once an individual recovers from Hepatitis A, they are immune for life and do not carry the virus.

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms usually begin 25-30 days after exposure but can range from 15-50 days and may include:
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored stool
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin/eyes)

Severity of symptoms can vary from mild to severe. Most children younger than 6 years of age do not have any symptoms. Also, some adults may not have symptoms.

How is it spread?
Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool (bowel movement) of infected persons. It spreads when hands, food, water or objects (toys, etc.) become contaminated with microscopic particles of the stool of an infected person and then get into someone’s mouth (e.g. when an infected person does not wash hands carefully after using the bathroom).

Who gets Hepatitis A?
Although anyone can get Hepatitis A, the following are at greater risk:
- Household contacts of infected persons.
- Sexual contacts of infected persons.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Persons traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common.
- Injecting and non-injecting drug users.

How is Hepatitis A diagnosed?
A blood test is needed to identify Hepatitis A.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?
The contagious period begins approximately 2 weeks before the symptoms appear and lasts until 1 week after the appearance of jaundice. If jaundice is not present, the person should be considered infectious for 2 weeks following the onset of symptoms. Infected persons without symptoms can spread the disease to others.

How is Hepatitis A treated?
There are no antibiotics or special medicines to treat Hepatitis A. Rest, good nutrition and supportive treatment is usually all that is necessary. Drugs and alcohol should be avoided.

What should I do if I have symptoms?
Contact your healthcare provider.

How can I prevent the spread of Hepatitis A?
- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds:
  - After using the bathroom or changing diapers.
  - Before preparing or eating food.
- The best way to prevent Hepatitis A is by getting vaccinated. Experts recommend the vaccine for all children at 1 year of age, some international travelers and people with certain risk factors and medical conditions. The Hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective and given as 2 shots 6 months apart. Both shots are needed for long term protection.
- Test internationally adopted children on arrival to U.S. for current Hepatitis A infection or immunity.
- All St. Louis County food handlers are required by law to be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

For further information visit:
http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis
http://www.vaccineinformation.org
http://www.stlouisco.com/HealthandWellness/Health/HepatitisAOrdInformation
For safe travelling tips:

Report Hepatitis A cases to Saint Louis County Department of Public Health by calling 314 615 1630