

Hepatitis



What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. The liver plays a number of vital roles necessary to keep our body healthy.

What are the causes?

There are many causes of hepatitis, including exposure to substances such as alcohol, medications, chemical poisons, and infections. Liver infections caused by viruses are common and called viral hepatitis. They are named by letters of the alphabet (A, B, C, D, E, G). The most widespread types are A, B and C.

What are the symptoms?

- Children usually don't show any symptoms.
- Adults often suffer from tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, fever, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes), dark brown urine and pale-colored bowel movements (stools).

How is hepatitis spread?

The viruses that cause hepatitis A and E are mainly spread through the fecal-oral route (e.g., placing in the mouth of hands and objects such as toys, food or drinks that are contaminated with the feces of an infected person). Outbreaks of hepatitis A from contaminated food have occurred in the United States. Hepatitis B, C, D and G are spread through blood or other body fluids.

Who is at risk?

Hepatitis A: Anyone can get hepatitis. However, child care providers who care for children in diapers are especially at risk. Others at risk include those having household and sexual contact with people suffering from hepatitis A, and those living in poor hygienic and sanitary conditions. Hepatitis A immunization is currently recommended in California for children.

Hepatitis B and C: These are unusual in the child care setting, but providers can find themselves at risk for hepatitis B. Persons in contact with other people's blood (e.g., lab technicians, health care providers or intravenous drug users who may share needles) are at higher risk for hepatitis B. It is also spread by infected mothers to newborn infants through blood exposure at birth. People with open sores, cuts and scrapes can also contract the infection if they come in contact with the blood or body fluid of an infected person.

When should you exclude a person with hepatitis from child care?

Hepatitis A: Exclude the child/adult until one week after the onset of symptoms, or as directed by the health department.

Hepatitis B: The child/adult should stay home until he/she feels well and fever and jaundice are gone.


Chronic Hepatitis B: The child or provider who has open sores that cannot be covered should not attend child care until the sores are healed.

Carriers of the Hepatitis B and C virus: Exclude these people only if they have uncontrolled biting or oozing skin lesions that cannot be covered.

Ways to avoid hepatitis

- Follow general precautions for prevention of infections, particularly when you come into contact with body fluids and waste which carry germs.
- Clean up blood spills immediately. Avoid contact with blood and body fluids as much as possible. Wear latex gloves as an extra precaution when cleaning blood spills and then wash your hands.
- If you have open sores, cuts or other abrasions on the hands, wear latex gloves for changing diapers or cleaning wounds.
- Do not allow sharing of personal items which may be contaminated with blood or body fluids, such as toothbrushes, food or objects that may be mouthed.
- When children in diapers are using wading or swimming pools, use swim diapers and notify the pool manager if a child has a leaky bowel movement.
- Discourage children's behavior which includes biting or scratching.
- Make sure that you and your children are up to date on immunization for hepatitis B.

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Provided by California Childcare Health Program
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