

Hepatitis A (Viral hepatitis A)

Viral hepatitis A is a viral inflammation of the liver. It can occur without obvious signs in the digestive tract. The disease occurs in the liver, and the main symptom is jaundice, which is visible on the skin. The pathogen is transmitted through food, water, or dirty hands.

Causes

The disease is caused by the hepatitis A virus, which is excreted by patients. It can survive in the environment for a short time. It is sensitive to disinfectants.

Incubation period

The time from infection to the onset of symptoms is around 3–4 weeks, but it can also be shorter (up to 15 days) or longer (up to 45 days), depending on the person's immune status and the infectious dose they receive.

Infectiousness period

A person is infectious 2 weeks before the onset of symptoms, during the illness, and for 2 weeks after the onset of jaundice, when large amounts of the virus are excreted in the stool.

Some people become infected but do not develop symptoms, yet they excrete viruses in their stool. These are carriers who spread the disease.

Susceptibility

Anyone can become infected with viral hepatitis A, but the disease is particularly dangerous for older people, chronically ill patients, and patients with liver damage. After recovering from the disease, lifelong immunity remains.

Clinical signs

In most cases, nonspecific problems due to liver inflammation appear first: fatigue, malaise, pain under the right rib cage. This is usually followed by yellowing of the skin (jaundice), light-coloured stools, and dark urine. Symptoms are milder in children and more severe in older people. In children, infections without symptoms are also common.

Transmission

Humans ingest hepatitis A viruses through food, water, or dirty hands. The pathogen is excreted in the faeces of infected individuals for a certain period of time. The pathogen returns to the environment from the patient or carrier, and in unhygienic conditions, the infection spreads to healthy individuals. The disease is very rarely caused by blood transfusions, organ transplants, or contact with blood from an asymptomatic carrier.

Treatment

Treatment for viral hepatitis A is symptomatic. Rest is recommended. The disease usually resolves on its own without consequences. In rare cases, especially in older people, complications in the liver may occur.

General preventive measures

Proper handling of human and animal waste:

The disease spreads more easily in areas, where there is no sewage system.

Washing hands and teeth:

After using the toilet and before preparing food and eating, always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and clean water.

Only brush your teeth with drinking water.

Food:

Only eat well-cooked/baked food that has been freshly prepared. Eat vegetables that have been thoroughly washed in drinking water.

People who are recovering from hepatitis A are not allowed to work in food production, transport, and sales, in the supply of drinking water to the population, or in the care and feeding of small children.

Water:

Only drink water that is hygienically safe.

In areas without proper sanitation or in suspicious environments, drink bottled water or boil it before use and consume it within 24 hours.

Specific preventive measures

Hepatitis A vaccination with inactivated vaccine: two doses of vaccine administered 6–12 months apart provide LASTING protection.