

Treatment for Hepatitis A

The infected persons have to overcome the virus naturally, returning to full health within a couple of months. Alcohol and fatty foods are to be avoided. Plenty of rest, nutritious diet and proper hand washing after using the toilet and before preparing food are recommended.

Available help

- Family doctor (GP)
- Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate on **2326 6000**

www.ehealth.gov.mt

Search for Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control Unit under the Public health drop down menu.

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Hepatitis A

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Ministry for Health, the Elderly
and Community Care

Hepatitis A

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Hepatitis A is a viral infection that causes inflammation of the liver.

How is Hepatitis A (HAV) spread?

HAV is common where sanitation and sewage mechanisms are poor. Transmission is from person to person via the faecal oral route. HAV can be transmitted also sexually during activities such as anilingus. HAV can affect all age groups.

Incubation period:(the time period between exposure to the virus and when the signs and symptoms are first apparent): between 2 to 6 weeks

Signs and Symptoms:

- short, mild flu-like symptoms
- nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- loss of appetite
- weight loss
- Jaundice (when the whites of the eyes turn yellow, the skin becomes yellow, the urine is darker and the faeces are pale).
- itchy skin
- abdominal pain

Infection usually clears within 2 months. Once the body has fought the infection the body is permanently immune. There are rarely any liver complications.

Hepatitis A can be contracted from:

- Raw oysters and other shellfish harvested from contaminated areas
- Vegetables irrigated by contaminated water
- Men who have sex with men (MSM)
- Close contacts (mostly household) of a Hepatitis A infected person



Hepatitis A prevention

Hepatitis A vaccination

- HAV immunisation protects against the disease. A single injection provides protection for approximately 12 months. A booster dose at 6 to 12 months gives protection that may last up to 25 years

- The vaccine is recommended before travelling to countries with unreliable hygienic standards e.g. Indian subcontinent, Africa, Central America, South America, the Far East and Eastern Europe
- The vaccine should be recommended to high risk groups such as MSM and intravenous drug abusers who share needles.

Hygienic measures

- Proper food hygiene practices including thorough and frequent hand-washing
- Oysters and shellfish should be cooked as follows: heating to a temperature of 85-90°C for 4 minutes or steamed for 90 seconds before eating
- In endemic areas, travellers should take only hot or bottled beverages and hot and well cooked food.

How is Hepatitis A diagnosed?

The diagnosis is carried out by a blood test through an antibody test. Blood tests for liver function will monitor its function and are repeated until recovery.