

**FACT SHEET****Hepatitis A and Drinking Water from Private Wells****What is hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV), which can affect anyone. In the United States, hepatitis A infections can occur in isolated situations or in widespread epidemics.

How can I become infected with hepatitis A virus?

Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of persons with hepatitis A. HAV is usually spread from person to person. It occurs by putting something in your mouth that had been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where personal hygiene is poor. Persons with hepatitis A can spread the virus to others who live in the same household. It can also be spread to those with whom they have sexual contact. Casual contact, as those in the office, factory, or school setting, does not spread the virus.

Where and how does hepatitis A virus get into drinking water?

Hepatitis A is found in every part of the United States and throughout the world. When water sources such as private wells are contaminated with feces from infected humans, the water will spread the hepatitis A virus. The virus can enter the water through various ways, including sewage overflows or broken sewage systems.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

The most common symptoms of hepatitis A include:

- Jaundice or yellowing of the skin and eyes
- Dark urine
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Stomach pain

Three out of four adults who are infected by HAV will develop symptoms, usually over a period of several days. The symptoms generally appear 2 to 6 weeks after infection with the virus. Children who are infected often have no symptoms.

What should I do if I think I have hepatitis A?

See your health care provider to discuss your concerns.

How is hepatitis A diagnosed?

A blood test can tell if hepatitis A is the cause of your illness. The test will look for antibodies to the virus.

What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

Consult with your health care provider. The usual treatment is bed rest, a balanced diet, and avoiding alcohol for at least 6 months. Antibiotics are not useful in treating such viral infections. In more serious

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cases, hospitalization may be necessary. Recovery from hepatitis A usually takes 4 to 8 weeks with no long-term liver damage.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to hepatitis A?

Contact your doctor or your local health department if you think that you have been exposed to hepatitis A or any type of viral hepatitis. Immune globulins, a preparation of antibodies, can prevent the disease if you receive it within 2 weeks of exposure. Vaccines for hepatitis A are available to provide long-term protection.

How do I remove hepatitis A from my drinking water?

Heating water at a full boil for 1 minute (3 minutes if you live in a high altitude) will kill or inactivate the hepatitis A virus. Water should then be stored in a clean container with a lid and refrigerated.

Because of the small size of the virus, using a point-of-use filter will not remove it from water.

You may also disinfect your well; adequate chlorination kills the hepatitis A virus. Contact your local health department for recommended procedures. Have your well water tested periodically after disinfection to make sure that the problem does not recur.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/healthywater