

Hepatitis A

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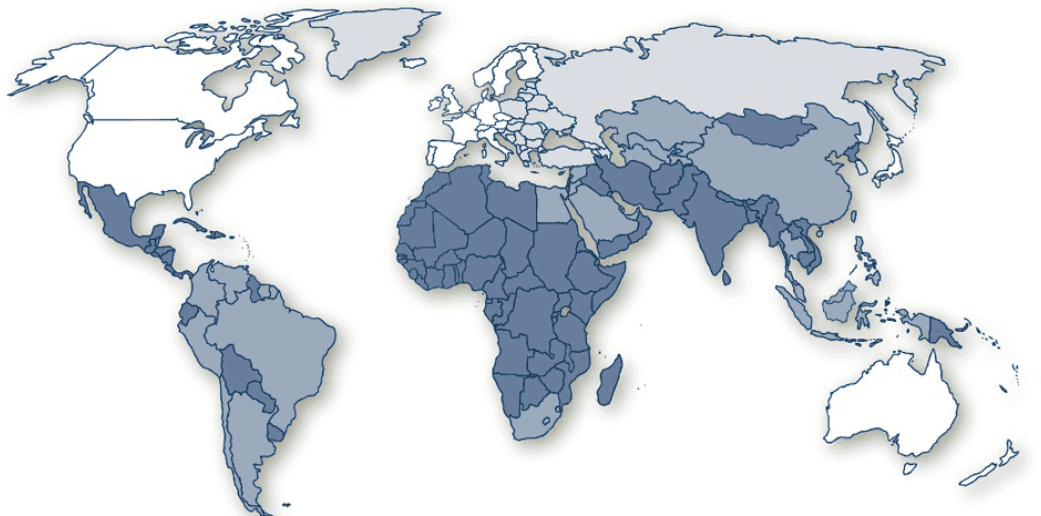
What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes inflammation of your liver. It is caught by eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

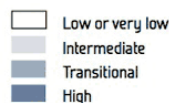
Where is it found?

Hepatitis A virus (HAV) is found all over the world, but is more common in parts of Africa, Asia and Central and South America. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates there are 1.4 million cases worldwide every year.

Hepatitis A Antibody Prevalence



Anti-hepatitis A antibody prevalence



Map from *Health Information for Overseas Travel*

How can I catch it?

HAV can spread between people living in conditions where they cannot guarantee good hygiene. For most travellers, exposure to HAV is from eating food or drinking water/fluids contaminated with human faeces. Certain foods, like shellfish or salads, can be contaminated with HAV. Food can also be contaminated if someone preparing or serving food is carrying HAV and does not follow basic hygiene rules.

Adults injecting illegal drugs or practising sexual activities involving faecal/oral contact are at increased risk. In the United Kingdom (UK) improved living standards and good sanitation mean that HAV is now rare and often linked to overseas travel.

Signs and symptoms

After exposure to HAV, it takes two to six weeks before symptoms develop. In young children, HAV usually causes a mild illness, but can still be infectious to other people. If you do become unwell, symptoms usually start about four weeks after exposure to the virus and include:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Weight loss
- Pale stools (faeces) and dark urine
- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Occasional rash and joint pains

If you are young and fit, you are likely to make a complete recovery, usually in about a month, although you could remain ill and infectious for many weeks. Complications can include liver failure, which can be fatal. Older people and those who already have a medical condition or problem with their liver are more likely to become seriously ill.

Can it be treated?

There is no specific treatment or drug, just supportive therapy.



Is there a vaccine?

There is a safe and effective vaccine readily available in the UK which can be given to adults and children from the age of one year. Two injections given six months apart provide at least 20 years protection against HAV.

Hepatitis A vaccine should be offered to you routinely if you are likely to come into contact with HAV because of activities in your personal life, your behaviour or your work, or if you have an existing illness such as liver disease or [haemophilia](#) (problems with blood clotting).

What is my risk?

The chance of catching HAV is low for most travellers. Visiting your friends and family, longer trips and staying in places with poor sanitation facilities all increase your risk.

How can I reduce my risk?

Follow common sense guidelines on [food and water](#) and personal hygiene to decrease your risk. Have the vaccine if you are going to risk areas ([see map](#)).

Links

- [British Liver Trust: Hepatitis A](#)
- [Health Protection Agency: Hepatitis A](#)
- [NHS Choices: Hepatitis A.](#)
- [World Health Organization: Hepatitis A - Key Facts](#)