

## HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis A is a viral infection affecting the liver. There are several types of hepatitis viruses, type A (HAV) generally causing the least serious liver infection. The virus is spread by inadequate hygiene, in contaminated food or water, or by infected food handlers. It is commonly spread in day care settings with young children, as hand washing may not be consistent. It may be spread through sexual contact. The disease is contagious before any symptoms develop, which may take 2–3 weeks.

### Symptoms *may* include:

- Low grade fever
- Nausea with or without vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Decreased appetite
- Fatigue
- Dark-colored urine and light-colored stools.
- *Jaundice* (yellowing of the eyes or skin).

### What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose hepatitis A by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam and ordering laboratory blood tests.
- Treatment is directed at relieving symptoms and limiting spread of the disease.
- Give an injection with gamma globulin for those in close contact with you. This can help prevent the disease.

### What *you* can do:

- Rest as much as possible.
- Maintain a bland diet and drink plenty of liquids.
- Avoid alcohol since it can further inflame and irritate the liver.
- To prevent the spread of disease to others, do not share eating utensils.
- Avoid handling or preparing food for others if possible.
- Everyone in the family should wash their hands frequently, especially those who handle food.
- For more information contact the Hepatitis Foundation International @ 1-800-891-0707.

### What *you* can expect:

The illness generally lasts a few weeks with the liver returning to normal by 2 months.

**Contact your doctor** if you have symptoms of dehydration from vomiting or diarrhea, and if you are unable to drink fluids for longer than one day.