



Patient instructions: Hepatitis A – instructions in case of close contact with an infected person

You have been in close contact with a person who has a diagnosed hepatitis A infection. Based on an assessment made by a healthcare professional, an exposed person will receive a hepatitis A vaccination and/or immunoglobulin, if needed.

information on hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is an inflammation of the liver caused by a virus, and it is a generally hazardous communicable disease. The hepatitis A virus usually transmits through food or water contaminated with feces, or from one person to another through hand transmission (between family members or in daycare, for example), or through sexual intercourse.

The virus will excrete in the feces of an infected person already a week before the first symptoms appear, and the excretion will end two weeks later. In most children under the age of 5, the disease causes no symptoms, or the symptoms are very mild, but children easily infect their close contacts. On average, most adults will experience symptoms 28 days after infection (the incubation period is 15–50 days).

The first symptoms may include tiredness, fever, nausea, loss of appetite, and pain on the upper right abdomen. About a week later, the whites of the eyes and the skin will turn yellow, feces often turn gray and urine turns dark. The disease will go away on its own without any specific treatment. Severe cases are rare. The hepatitis A virus does not cause a chronic infection, and the patient will not become a long-term carrier. Having had the illness provides life-long protection against new infections.

Hepatitis A vaccination

A previous hepatitis A infection or a series of vaccinations against hepatitis A protect against infection. If the exposed person has no previous protection, they will primarily receive a hepatitis A vaccination. The vaccine must be given within 2 weeks of the exposure at the latest. To reach long-term protection, unvaccinated people need two doses of the hepatitis A vaccine.

Immunoglobulin

Immunoglobulin contains antibodies against hepatitis A. If a person cannot be vaccinated, they will receive immunoglobulin. In people who belong to certain at-risk groups due to their underlying illness or age, the protection provided by the vaccine may take longer to develop. With these people, a healthcare professional will assess if they need immunoglobulin in addition to the vaccine. Immunoglobulin will be given within 2 weeks, but no later than 4 weeks, of the exposure.

Hand hygiene

Maintain good hand hygiene: wash your hands with water and soap, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers. Do not prepare food for other people.

Monitor your symptoms and seek treatment if you experience any.

If you get infected despite the instructions listed above, seek treatment. Let the healthcare personnel know that you have been exposed to hepatitis A.

Further information in Finnish
www.thl.fi Hepatiitti A