



VIRAL HEPATITIS AND SOUTH ASIANS

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- Viral hepatitis is the inflammation of the liver that is caused by a virus.¹
- There are many different viruses that can cause hepatitis. The viruses that most commonly cause hepatitis are hepatitis A, B, and C viruses.
- Vaccines are available to immunize against hepatitis A and B viruses.
- Some types of hepatitis (especially B and C) may not cause symptoms until the infection is advanced.
- Hepatitis causes liver cells to swell, which can lead to jaundice (a yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes).
- Persons at risk for getting hepatitis B and C include:
 - Individuals with sexually transmitted diseases or infections including those with HIV or AIDS;
 - Men who have sex with men; and
 - Injection drug users.
- Hepatitis A is acquired by drinking infected water and is common in Asian countries.
- Given that South Asians may be in the above risk categories, South Asians are at-risk for getting viral hepatitis.
- Casual contact, such as in the office and/or school setting does **NOT** spread hepatitis.

Hepatitis A Infection²

- Hepatitis A (HAV) is usually spread through infected water or food. It is spread by fecal-oral (or stool to mouth) transmission when a person ingests food or drink contaminated by an infected person's stool.

- HAV can be acquired by contact with an infected family member, IV drug user or sex partner.
- Most people recover in several weeks - or sometimes months - without complications.
- **There is a vaccine that can help prevent a person from getting HAV.**

Hepatitis B Infection³

- Hepatitis B (HBV) infection puts people at high risk of death from cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer.
- HBV is widespread in South and Southeast Asia.
- HBV is not spread by contaminated food or water, and cannot be spread casually in the workplace.
- HBV can be transmitted to someone by injecting drug use, blood transfusion, or if blood or sexual fluids from an infected person comes in contact with a break in the skin or lining of the vagina, anus, or mouth during sexual intercourse.
- Mothers infected with HBV also have a high risk of infecting their newborn babies. Infected babies will likely carry the disease their whole lives.
- Hepatitis B is unlikely to be passed through breast milk from a mother to her child.
- **There is a vaccine that can help prevent adults and newborns from getting HBV.**



Hepatitis C Infection⁴

- Hepatitis C (HCV) is transmitted through blood transfusions, unsafe sexual practices and/or unsafe use of injectable drugs.
- Chronic HCV is one of the most common conditions for which a person in the U.S. may need a liver transplant.
- **There is no vaccine for HCV at this time.**

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- A person with hepatitis may feel tired or weak, even with a normal routine.
- Hepatitis may cause pain in the abdomen, especially just below the right rib cage in the area of the liver.
- Loss of appetite and the feeling of nausea (vomiting) at the sight of food (or cigarettes in smokers) are also common signs of hepatitis.
- Diarrhea or constipation, dark urine and pale stools, and low-grade fever are also common signs.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B viruses. Make sure children are vaccinated per recommended schedules for hepatitis.
- Keep your home or work place clean and wash your hands before eating meals and after using the bathroom.

- Educate family, friends, and your community on how hepatitis can be spread.
- Use safe sex practices (such as condoms) and DO NOT share needles if using intravenous drugs.
- Ask all pregnant women to get tested for Hepatitis B in early pregnancy, and educate them about how the disease can pass from mother to child.
- Inform parents about the importance of early vaccination for their newborn babies to keep their babies from getting hepatitis B.
- Visit your health care provider on a regular basis to discuss issues related to hepatitis and other infectious diseases.

RESOURCES

National

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

Phone: (800) 232-4636

Website: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

World Health Organization

www.who.int/topics/hepatitis/en/

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¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Viral Hepatitis. Available at: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm. Accessed 22 August 2010.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hepatitis A Information for Health Professionals. Available at: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HAV/index.htm. Accessed 22 August 2010.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hepatitis C Information for Health Professionals. Available at: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HCV/index.htm. Accessed 22 August 2010.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hepatitis C Information for Health Professionals. Available at: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HCV/index.htm. Accessed 22 August 2010.

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