

Key aspects briefly summarized

- Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by a virus.
- The virus is easily transmitted through contaminated food or water, but can also be transmitted through sexual contact.
- There is a safe and very effective vaccine that offers lifelong protection.
- The hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for all travellers to tropical or subtropical countries and for risk groups.

Disease

Hepatitis A is caused by a highly contagious virus that affects the liver. It is also known as infectious jaundice or traveller's hepatitis. Hepatitis A is one of the most common infectious diseases that can be contracted when travelling if you have not been vaccinated against it.

Occurrence / risk areas

Hepatitis A occurs worldwide, but the risk of infection is higher in countries with poor hygiene conditions. There is an increased risk in most tropical and subtropical countries as well as in some countries in Eastern Europe and around the Mediterranean. Outbreaks in northern European countries can also occur when unvaccinated children become infected during family visits to tropical and subtropical countries and transmit the virus in their care facilities on their return.

In recent years, there has also been an increase in cases in North America and Europe, including Switzerland, particularly among men who have sex with men (MSM).

Transmission

Transmission mainly occurs through contaminated (faecal) drinking water or food. Other transmission routes are close personal contact, especially sexual contact (anal-oral sex) or inadequate hand hygiene.

Symptoms

Around 2-4 weeks after infection, symptoms such as fever, tiredness, nausea, loss of appetite and diarrhoea may occur. Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice) may follow within a few days. Most symptoms disappear after a few weeks to months, although fatigue can persist for months. In young children, there are usually few or no symptoms, but in older people, the disease can be severe and protracted. Once the infection has been cured, immunity is lifelong.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment. Recovery from an acute hepatitis A infection can take several weeks to months. Vaccination up to 7 days after contact with the virus can prevent the outbreak or mitigate the course of the disease.

Prevention

There is a safe and very effective vaccine that consists of two injections at least 6 months apart. It offers lifelong protection after the second dose. The hepatitis A vaccination can also be administered in combination with the hepatitis B vaccination (3 doses required if given to persons 16 years and older)

Vaccination against hepatitis A is recommended for all travellers to risk areas and for people with an increased personal risk, such as people with chronic liver disease, men who have sex with men and people with an increased occupational risk, such as in the health service or in contact with waste water.

Further information / references

- [Federal Office of Public Health \(FOPH\). Hepatitis A](#)
- [Hepatitis Switzerland](#)