Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is an infectious acute disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). The hepatitis A virus is a member of the picornavirus family and an enterovirus spread via the fecal-oral route with an average incubation period of 4 weeks. The incidence of hepatitis A is much higher in developing countries and regions with poor hygiene. In these areas, the illness is often contracted in early childhood and rarely causes clinical signs and symptoms. In industrialized countries, the infection is often contracted by susceptible adults who get infected by the virus during trips to countries with high incidence of disease. In most individuals, HAV infection causes a self-limited disease that does not result in chronic infection. Patients that are not asymptomatic have symptoms of jaundice, fever and vomiting. Acute liver failure from HAV is rare.



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Characteristics

Picornavirus
Pickle-corn-virus
Picornaviruses are nonenveloped, single stranded positive sense RNA viruses with an icosahedral capsid. This virus family includes many important human pathogens including enteroviruses and rhinoviruses. Enteroviruses that cause human disease include poliovirus, echovirus, coxsackievirus, and hepatitis A virus.

4 Week Incubation Period
(4) Fork
Compared to the other hepatitis infections, HAV has a relatively short incubation period of about 4 weeks (average of 28 days). This incubation period is variable, however, and ranges from 15-50 days.

Fecal-oral
Apple falling in feces
This virus is spread via the fecal-oral route and transmitted by ingestion of contaminated food or water.

Day Care Centers
Day care kids with toys
There is increased incidence of HAV in children in daycare centers due to increased fecal-oral contact.

Travel to Developing Countries
Traveling-backpacker
In industrialized countries, the infection is often contracted by susceptible adults who get infected by the virus during trips to developing countries with high incidence of disease.

Signs and Symptoms

Usually Asymptomatic
Asymptomatic happy children
In most children, HAV infection is usually asymptomatic and rarely causes clinical signs and symptoms.

Acute Disease
Acute angle sign
HAV does not result in chronic infection of the liver.

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Jaundice

Jaundice-janitor

Individuals that suffer from clinical symptoms of HAV often experience jaundice, which is yellowing of the skin and sclera due to hyperbilirubinemia, often caused by liver damage.

Fever

Fever-beaver

Individuals that suffer from clinical symptoms of HAV often experience fever.

Vomiting

Vomit

Individuals that suffer from clinical symptoms of HAV often have vomiting.

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