Hepatitis A (HAV) Assessment

Hepatitis A is an acute infectious disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). Its incidence in the United States has declined since vaccination was recommended for children and at risk individuals. Hepatitis A is spread through the fecal-oral route, likely from ingesting contaminated food or water. Individuals are most infectious during the 2 weeks before the onset of symptoms and remain infectious until 1-2 weeks after the start of symptoms.



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Transmission

Fecal-Oral
Poop-to-mouth
Hepatitis A (HAV) is a ribonucleic acid (RNA) virus primarily transmitted through the fecal-oral route. Thus, it is present in poverty-stricken countries where clean water and food may not be available.

Ingestion of Contaminated Food or Water
Eating Bio-hazard Food and Water
Outbreaks of hepatitis A often occur due to fecal contamination of food or drinking water. Contributing factors include improper handling of food, poor sanitary and hygiene conditions, as well as crowded conditions.

Incubation

4 Weeks
(4) Fork
The incubation period for hepatitis A is a range between 15-50 days, with an average of 28 days (4 weeks). The greatest risk of transmission occurs around 2 weeks before the onset of symptoms, with patients being infectious until 1-2 weeks after the start of symptoms.

Assessment

Fever
Fever-beaver
Manifestations of hepatitis A often resemble flu-like symptoms and often don’t appear until the individual has had the virus for a couple weeks. A low-grade fever may be present.

General Malaise
General Malaise
The individual may experience general malaise or a generalized feeling of discomfort. Nausea and vomiting, fatigue, and loss of appetite are common complaints.

Hepatomegaly
Liver-balloon
Symptoms of hepatitis A are rarely severe unless there is underlying liver failure. Some patients may experience hepatomegaly or swelling of the liver beyond normal.

Considerations

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Self-Limiting

Self-closing

Hepatitis A is a self-limiting infection meaning that it usually resolves itself without treatment. It is often detected by the presence of antibodies to hepatitis A virus.

Proper Hand Washing

Hand Washing Station

Proper hand washing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of hepatitis A. This is especially important for food handlers.

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