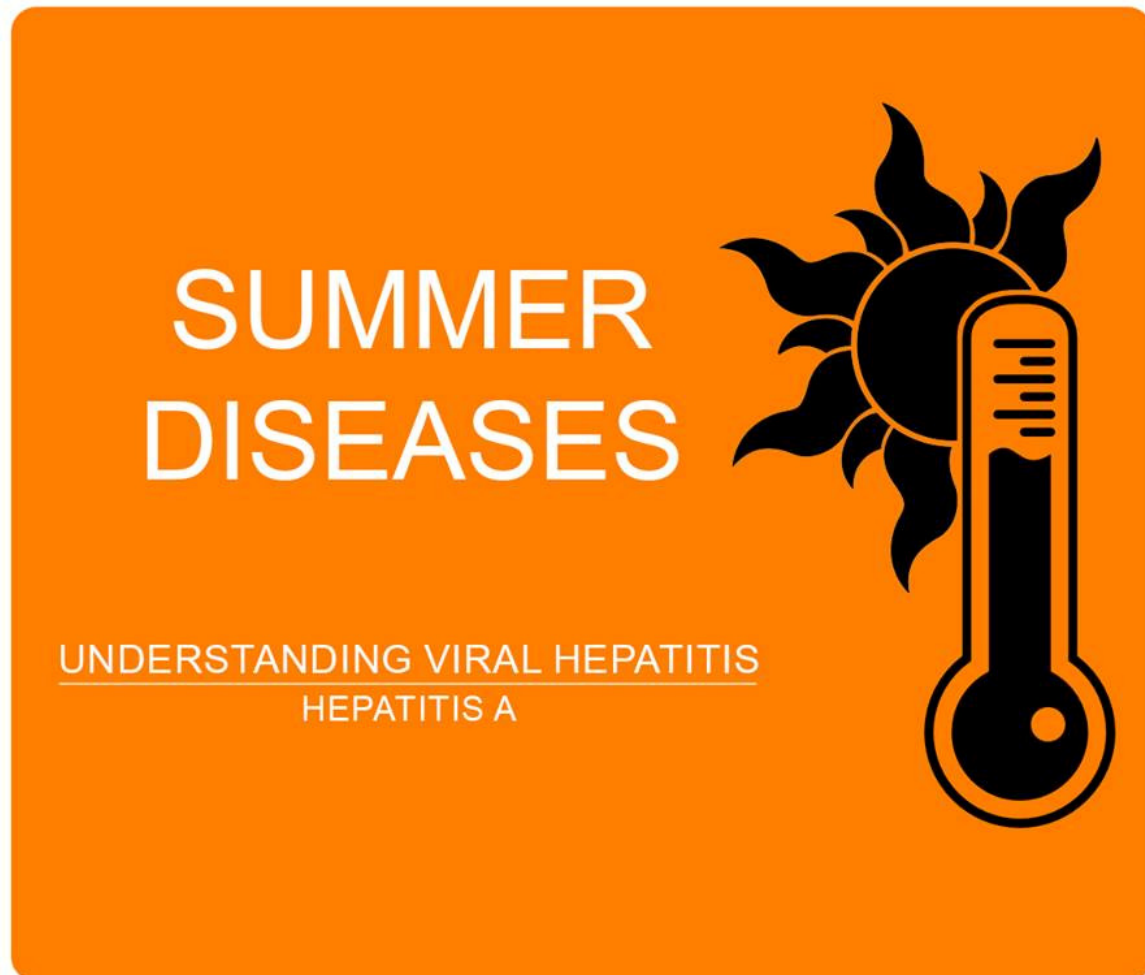


Understanding Viral Hepatitis A



DR. PURNENDU BHOWMIK
MBBS, MS, FMAS, FIAGES, FALS, FAIS, FACS
GI, GI Onco & Laparoscopic Surgeon



Key Facts

Hepatitis A is a viral liver disease that can cause mild to severe illness.

- The hepatitis A virus (HAV) is transmitted through ingestion of contaminated food and water or through direct contact with an infectious person.

- Almost everyone recovers fully from hepatitis A with a lifelong immunity. However, a very small proportion of people infected with hepatitis A could die from fulminant hepatitis.
- The risk of hepatitis A infection is associated with a lack of safe water, and poor sanitation and hygiene (such as dirty hands).
- Epidemics can be explosive and cause substantial economic loss.
- A safe and effective vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis A.
- Safe water supply, food safety, improved sanitation, hand washing and the hepatitis A vaccine are the most effective ways to combat the disease.

Typical signs and symptoms of Hepatitis include:

The incubation period of hepatitis A is usually 14–28 days.

Symptoms of hepatitis A range from mild to severe, and can include fever, malaise, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark-coloured urine and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes). Not everyone who is infected will have all of the symptoms.

Adults have signs and symptoms of illness more often than children. The severity of disease and fatal outcomes are higher in older age groups. Infected children under 6 years of age do not usually experience noticeable symptoms, and only 10% develop jaundice. Among older children and adults, infection usually causes more severe symptoms, with jaundice occurring in more than 70% of cases. Hepatitis A sometimes relapses. The person who just recovered falls sick again with another acute episode. This is, however, followed by recovery.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is spread primarily through food or water contaminated by faeces from an infected person. Rarely, it spreads through contact with infected blood.

Who is at risk for Hepatitis A?

People most likely to get hepatitis A are

- International travellers, particularly those traveling to developing countries
- People living in areas where children are not routinely vaccinated against hepatitis A, where outbreaks are more likely
- Day care children and employees, during outbreaks
- Men who have sex with men

How can hepatitis A be prevented?

- The hepatitis A vaccine offers immunity to adults and children older than age 1.
- It is recommended to have routine hepatitis A vaccination for children aged 12 to 23 months and for adults who are at high risk for infection.
- Treatment with immune globulin can provide short-term immunity to hepatitis A when given before exposure or within 2 weeks of exposure to the virus.
- Avoiding tap water when traveling internationally and practicing good hygiene and sanitation also help prevent hepatitis A

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Recovery from symptoms following infection may be slow and may take several weeks or months. Most important is the avoidance of unnecessary medications. Acetaminophen / Paracetamol and medication against vomiting should not be given.

Hospitalization is unnecessary in the absence of acute liver failure. Therapy is aimed at maintaining comfort and adequate nutritional balance, including replacement of fluids that are lost from vomiting and diarrhea.