

## Hepatitis A, B & C

### Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis A virus.

#### **How do you get Hepatitis A?**

Hepatitis A virus (HAV) is found in the stool of persons with Hepatitis A. HAV is usually spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with Hepatitis A. For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where good personal hygiene is not observed. In addition to getting Hepatitis A directly from infected people, you can get Hepatitis A by:

- Swallowing contaminated water or ice
- Eating raw shellfish harvested from sewage-contaminated water
- Eating fruits, vegetables, or other food that may have become contaminated during handling.

Immune globulin, a preparation of antibodies, is recommended for short-term protection against Hepatitis A and for persons who have already been exposed to HAV. Immune globulin must be given within two weeks of exposure to HAV for maximum protection. As immune globulin is in short supply, a vaccine is preferred for travelers two years of age and older.

#### **How do you know if you have Hepatitis A?**

You may have these symptoms:

- Your eyes may turn yellow and you may have dark urine
- You may be tired
- You may lose appetite
- You may have nausea, vomiting, fever, or stomach ache.

#### **How can you prevent Hepatitis A?**

You should always wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing a diaper and before eating or preparing food.

### Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. The virus, which is called Hepatitis B virus (HBA), can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure and death.

#### **How do you get Hepatitis B?**

You get Hepatitis B by direct contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person; for example, you can become infected by having sex or sharing needles with an infected person. A baby can get Hepatitis B from an infected mother during childbirth. All babies, beginning at birth, should get a Hepatitis B vaccine.

### **How do you know if you have Hepatitis B?**

You may have Hepatitis B (and be spreading the disease) and not know it; sometimes a person with HBV infection has no symptoms at all. You may have these symptoms:

- Your eyes or skin may turn yellow
- You may lose your appetite
- You may have nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach or joint pain
- You may feel extremely tired and not be able to work for weeks/months.

There is no cure for Hepatitis B; this is why prevention is so important. Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection against HBV. Three doses are needed for complete protection.

Hepatitis C

### **What is Hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of persons who have this disease. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person

### **How serious is Hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get Hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of these persons have some liver damage, but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some persons with liver damage due to the Hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, which may take many years to develop.