

## **THE A B C's OF HEPATITIS**

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Though many causes of hepatitis exist (drugs, alcohol, toxins), our focus will be on the viral hepatitises. Presently there are six types: Hepatitis A, B, C, D, E, and G. All types of viral hepatitis produce clinically similar illnesses which can range from symptomatic to severe and even fatal.

**HEPATITIS A:** The hepatitis A virus is transmitted by the fecal-oral route, which means that consumed food has been contaminated by feces containing the A virus. The incubation period is about 30 days from time of contamination to clinical disease.

Symptoms begin with fatigue, nausea, vomiting, headache, and low grade fever and progress to dark urine, clay colored stools and jaundice. The treatment is restricted physical activity and a high calorie diet. Recovery usually occurs in one to two months. Prevention lies in drinking sterile bottled water and eating well cooked foods. Fruit should be peeled with clean hands, and salads and raw shellfish should be avoided when traveling in developing countries. Hepatitis A vaccine is available. Two injections are required from 6 to 12 months apart.

**HEPATITIS B:** This virus is transmitted by infected body fluids including blood, saliva, tears, seminal fluid, breast milk, sexual contact and perinatal transmission. More than 200 million hepatitis B carriers in the world constitute the main source of hepatitis B in humans. The incubation period is from 30 to 180 days.

The range of symptoms runs the gamut from asymptomatic to profoundly ill with jaundice, liver and spleen enlargement, and weight loss. Recovery is prolonged and both carrier state and chronic active hepatitis are complications which ultimately lead to cirrhosis and liver failure. Approximately one-third of hepatitis B patients are associated with hepatitis D also, which usually accelerates the overall severity.

Treatment is supportive since no specific medication is available. Liver transplantation can be an option in some cases.

Hepatitis B vaccine is available which consists of three injections: initial, 1 month, and 6 months.

**HEPATITIS C:** Hepatitis C virus infection is the most common chronic blood borne infection, and the leading cause of liver transplants in the United States. It is spread by direct contact with infected blood. People should be tested for the virus if they have ever used injection drugs not prescribed by a doctor or had a blood transfusion, kidney dialysis, or solid organ transplantation before 1992 when blood was first screened for hepatitis C. There have been sporadic cases reported in people with tattoos and body piercing, health workers exposed to hepatitis with infected blood through accidental needle sticks or open sores, and neonates born to infected mothers. People with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or sexually transmitted diseases should also be tested for hepatitis C, since there is a high co-infection rate.

Many of those infected experience no symptoms; although, some have symptoms that appear briefly 6 – 7 weeks after infection. Symptoms include nausea, jaundice, dark urine, light – colored stools, stomach pain, loss of appetite, mild fever, flu – like illness and fatigue. Hepatitis G frequently co – exists with hepatitis C.

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, and the virus is currently difficult to treat. Some encouraging new treatments are being developed, along with Interferon and Ribavirin.

**HEPATITIS D:** Infection with hepatitis D has a worldwide distribution. Often it co – exists with hepatitis B. The disease is transmitted by close personal contact as well as by persons exposed frequently to blood and blood products (drug addicts, hemophiliacs). The course is similar to hepatitis B. Infection with hepatitis D can usually be prevented by vaccinating susceptible persons with hepatitis B vaccine, and avoidance of exposure to persons with hepatitis B or D. No drug therapy is available.

**HEPATITIS E:** Hepatitis E resembles hepatitis A in its primary spread by the fecal – oral route. Commonly, the cases are seen in India, Asia, Africa and Central America after contamination of the water supply such as after flooding (monsoons). It rarely spreads from person – to – person contact. Whether immune globulin prevents hepatitis E is unknown. Development of a vaccine is in progress.

**HEPATITIS G:** As mentioned earlier, hepatitis G frequently occurs with hepatitis C. It is a blood born virus and has no vaccine or specific treatment at present.

We at the Health Center will be happy to help you.



**Healthfully yours,**

**Dr. Healthberry**

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For questions or comments you can;

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