

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a liver infection that is spread in the poo of an infected person. Most people who get it get better within a few months.

Hepatitis A is not common in the UK but it is common in other parts of the world.

How you can get hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus that spreads in poo.

The infection is more common in parts of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Central and South America.

You can get hepatitis A from:

- drinking unclean water
- eating food that's been washed or grown in unclean water
- eating food that's been handled by an infected person
- close physical contact with an infected person, including having sex and sharing needles to take drugs

Information:

[You can check the risks of a country you're travelling to on the TravelHealthPro website](#)

How to prevent hepatitis A

Hepatitis A vaccination

Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A vaccines are not routinely offered in the UK because the risk of getting infected is low.

You only need to get a vaccine if you are at high risk of catching or getting seriously ill from hepatitis A. For example:

- you are travelling to a country where hepatitis A is common – you may need to pay for a hepatitis A vaccine for travel
- you have recently been in close physical contact with someone with hepatitis A
- you have long-term liver disease
- you have a blood clotting disorder, such as some people with haemophilia
- you are a man who has sex with men

- your job puts you at risk of infection – for example, you're a healthcare worker or a sewage worker

Speak to your GP if you think you need a hepatitis A vaccine. If your job puts you at risk, your employer should organise your vaccination.

Information:

If you are travelling abroad, get advice from a travel clinic, GP, nurse, or pharmacist before you go.

Other ways to reduce your risk

You can also help prevent hepatitis A when travelling by:

- washing your hands thoroughly before preparing and eating food
- drinking bottled water
- avoiding eating shellfish and uncooked fruit and vegetables
- using a condom or dam when having sex

Symptoms of hepatitis A

Symptoms of hepatitis A infection include:

- a high temperature
- flu-like symptoms, such as tiredness, headache, and muscle pains
- feeling sick or being sick
- pain in your upper tummy
- diarrhoea or constipation
- pale yellow or pale grey poo
- dark brown pee
- itchy skin – you may also have a raised rash ([hives](#))
- yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes ([jaundice](#))

Most children, and some adults, may have mild symptoms or no symptoms.

Non-urgent advice: See a GP if:

You have symptoms of hepatitis A and:

- you've recently travelled to a country where hepatitis A is common
- you've recently been in close contact with someone with hepatitis A

- you have a blood clotting disorder, such as haemophilia
- you're a man who has sex with men
- you've shared needles when taking drugs
- your job puts you at risk of infection

Tell the GP that you think you might have hepatitis A.

Treatment for hepatitis A

Hepatitis A usually clears up on its own within 3 to 6 months.

Your doctor may offer you medicines to help with the symptoms, such as painkillers or medicines to stop you feeling sick or itchy.

A small number of people with hepatitis A may get liver problems. You may need blood tests to check your liver is working properly.

Things you can do if you have hepatitis A

There are some things you can do when you have hepatitis A to help ease the symptoms, and to stop infecting others.

Important:How long you're infectious

You're usually infectious for either:

- 7 days after yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice) started
- 7 days after your symptoms started, if you've not had jaundice

Do

- limit contact with other people for 7 days after your symptoms started or 7 days after jaundice started (adults should stay off work and children should stay off from school or nursery)
- rest and drink plenty of fluids
- take painkillers like ibuprofen and paracetamol - ask your doctor for advice on how much paracetamol you should take because you may not be able to take a normal dose
- keep your room well ventilated, wear loose-fitting clothing, and avoid hot baths and showers if you feel itchy
- wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet

Don't

- do not drink alcohol
- do not prepare food or drink for others
- do not have sex without a condom or dam until you're no longer infectious
- do not share needles with others

Hepatitis B vaccine

The hepatitis B vaccine helps protect against hepatitis B. It's given to all babies and people at higher risk from hepatitis B.

What the hepatitis B vaccine is for

[Hepatitis B](#) is an infection that affects the liver. It's spread through blood, semen and vaginal fluids.

Hepatitis B can be very serious. It can make the liver suddenly stop working or cause gradual damage to the liver over time. It can also increase your chances of getting [liver cancer](#).

Vaccination against hepatitis B helps reduce your chances of getting infected.

Who should have the hepatitis B vaccine

Vaccination against hepatitis B is recommended for all babies as part of the [NHS vaccination schedule](#).

The hepatitis B vaccine is also recommended for people at higher risk of catching or getting seriously ill from hepatitis B.

Babies

All babies should have 3 doses of the [6-in-1 vaccine](#), which helps protect against hepatitis B and other illnesses.

A dose is given at:

- 8 weeks old
- 12 weeks old
- 16 weeks old

If you have hepatitis B while you're pregnant, there's a much higher chance your baby could get the infection. Because of this risk, your baby will be given extra doses of a hepatitis B vaccine:

- within 24 hours of being born
- at 4 weeks old
- at 12 months old (if they were born on or before 30 June 2024) – babies born on or after 1 July 2024 will get a new 4th dose of the 6-in-1 vaccine when they're 18 months old instead

This means they'll have 6 doses in total.

People at risk from hepatitis B

The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for people at higher risk from hepatitis B, including:

- people who inject drugs or live with someone who injects drugs
- people who change sexual partners often
- gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men
- sex workers
- close family members or sexual partners of someone with hepatitis B
- people who have regular blood transfusions or blood products (and their carers)
- people with long-term (chronic) liver disease or kidney failure
- healthcare workers and some laboratory staff
- prison staff and prisoners
- people travelling to parts of the world where they have a higher risk of getting hepatitis B
- families adopting or fostering children from parts of the world where hepatitis B is more common
- people who live in accommodation for people with learning disabilities or work with people with severe learning disabilities

People exposed to hepatitis B

The hepatitis B vaccine can help stop you getting hepatitis B if you're exposed to the blood or other body fluids of an infected person.

For example, it may be recommended if you've been bitten by someone or you've been injured by a used needle.

Information:

Check your travel risk

[You can check the risks of a country you're travelling to on the TravelHealthPro website](#)

Who cannot have the hepatitis B vaccine

Most people who need the hepatitis B vaccine can have it, including if you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

The only reason you cannot have the vaccine is if you've had a serious allergic reaction ([anaphylaxis](#)) to a previous dose of the vaccine or an ingredient in the vaccine.

Information:

Getting vaccinated if you're unwell

If you have a high temperature or feel too unwell to do your normal activities, wait until you're feeling better before having the vaccine.

Hepatitis B vaccine ingredients

There are several types of hepatitis B vaccine used in the UK. You can check the ingredients in the patient leaflets.

Vaccines that only protect against hepatitis B

These vaccines only help protect you from hepatitis B:

- [Engerix B vaccine patient leaflet \(Electronic Medicines Compendium website; PDF only, 167kb\)](#)
- [Fendrix vaccine patient leaflet \(Electronic Medicines Compendium website; PDF only, 142kb\)](#)
- [HBvaxPRO vaccine patient leaflet \(Electronic Medicines Compendium website\)](#)

Combined hepatitis A and B vaccines

If you're also at risk of hepatitis A, you may be given 1 of these vaccines to help protect you from both hepatitis A and hepatitis B:

- [Twinrix Adult vaccine patient leaflet \(Electronic Medicines Compendium website; PDF only, 171kb\)](#)
- [Twinrix Paediatric vaccine patient leaflet \(Electronic Medicines Compendium website; PDF only, 168kb\)](#)
- [Ambirix vaccine patient leaflet \(Electronic Medicines Compendium website; PDF only, 187kb\)](#)

Vaccines that protect babies from hepatitis B and other illnesses (6-in-1 vaccines)

All babies are given 1 of these vaccines as part of the NHS vaccination schedule:

- [Infranix hexa 6-in-1 vaccine patient leaflet \(Electronic Medicines Compendium website; PDF only, 167KB\)](#)
- [Vaxelis 6-in-1 vaccine patient leaflet \(Electronic Medicines Compendium website\)](#)

How to get the hepatitis B vaccine

There are different ways to get vaccinated against hepatitis B.

Where to get the hepatitis B vaccine

Who should have it	How to get it
Babies	You'll usually be contacted by your baby's GP surgery (speak to the surgery if you've not been contacted)
People travelling to parts of the world where they have a higher risk of getting hepatitis B	From travel vaccination clinics, pharmacies with travel health services and some GP surgeries (you'll usually have to pay)
People at risk through their work	Speak to your employer about getting vaccinated
People at risk of hepatitis B from sexual activity	Visit a sexual health clinic
Other people at higher risk (for example because someone in their home has it or they have a condition that raises their risk)	Speak to your GP surgery

How the hepatitis B vaccine is given

The hepatitis B vaccine is given as an injection into the upper arm or thigh.

You need at least 3 doses of the vaccine to give you the best protection from hepatitis B.

There's usually a month gap between each dose, but sometimes 3 doses can be given within 21 days (with a 4th dose 12 months after the first dose) if you need faster protection.

Some people (such as babies exposed to hepatitis B before birth) need more than 3 doses to get the best protection.

Booster doses

You usually only need booster doses of a hepatitis B vaccine if:

- you're a healthcare worker and blood tests show that 3 doses of the vaccine have not given you enough protection from hepatitis B
- you have kidney failure – you may need more doses if a blood test shows your protection has reduced
- you're exposed to hepatitis B (for example, you're bitten by someone or injured by a used needle)

Information:

Having the hepatitis B vaccine at the same time as other vaccines

You can have the hepatitis B vaccine at the same time as other vaccines, including the rotavirus vaccine and MMR vaccine.

Side effects of the hepatitis B vaccine

Most of the side effects of the hepatitis B vaccine are mild and do not last long.

They can include:

- swelling or pain where the injection was given
- feeling tired, sleepy or irritable
- a headache
- feeling or being sick
- diarrhoea
- a stomach ache
- a high temperature

More serious side effects such as a severe allergic reaction are very rare. The person who vaccinates you will be trained to deal with allergic reactions and treat them immediately.

The hepatitis B vaccines used in the UK contain a killed (destroyed) version of the hepatitis B virus, so there's no risk of getting the infection from the vaccine.

Information:

More about vaccine safety

[Find out more about why vaccination is important and the safest way to protect yourself](#)

How well the hepatitis B vaccine works

The hepatitis B vaccine works very well at helping protect people against hepatitis B.

Research has shown that:

- 90% of adults and over 98% of babies have good protection from hepatitis B after being vaccinated
- protection against long-term hepatitis B infection could last for as long as 20 to 30 years after being vaccinated

The vaccine can work less well in some people, such as people with kidney failure, so extra doses are sometimes needed.

Important

There's still a chance you could get hepatitis B after being vaccinated, so it's still important to try to reduce your risk of catching it, such as by using condoms during sex and not sharing toothbrushes or needles.