



VIRAL HEPATITIS

What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an illness that causes a swelling of the liver. Hepatitis is serious because it affects the way the liver works. The liver is an organ, which helps to digest food and keep the blood healthy. Hepatitis may be acute and last only a few months or it may be chronic and last for more than six months.

What causes Hepatitis?

Several viruses are known to cause this illness, they are:

Hepatitis A

A person gets this virus by eating or drinking impure food or water. The virus spreads when food is touched by someone who has not washed their hands well, by contact with people living in the same house who have the virus, by children sharing toys at day-care or school and by eating raw shellfish that comes from impure water. This type of hepatitis is never chronic; the liver usually heals within two months on its own. Hepatitis A can be prevented by vaccination.

Hepatitis B

A person gets this virus by having sex with an infected person, being in contact with an infected person's body fluids, sharing dirty needles or being in contact with infected blood. A mother can also pass the virus on to her child during or after birth. Most people get better within six months but some people will have the virus for the rest of their life and will develop permanent liver damage. Hepatitis B can be prevented by vaccination.

Hepatitis C

A person gets this virus by having sex with an infected person, being in contact with infected blood or sharing dirty needles – including tattoo needles. Some people with this virus have only mild symptoms but about 20% of those people with the disease will develop permanent liver damage. There is no vaccine available to prevent Hepatitis C.

Other Viruses

Other viruses may also cause hepatitis. These include the Epstein-Barr virus, which causes mononucleosis (mono), the varicella virus that causes chickenpox, the herpes – simplex virus and a virus called cytomegalovirus (CMV).

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis?

The most common symptoms of hepatitis include:

- Dark colored urine
- Stomach pains
- Yellow skin or yellow eye-whites
- Pale or clay-colored feces
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling tired
- Feeling nauseous
- Aching joints

How is Hepatitis treated?

There are no medications used to treat Hepatitis A. This virus usually goes away on its own. For people with Hepatitis C and chronic Hepatitis B, combinations of medications are used to lower the amount of virus in the blood and prevent liver damage.

How can I prevent Hepatitis?

There are many things you can do to decrease your chances of getting hepatitis. These include:

- Getting the vaccines for Hepatitis A and B
- Using a latex condom during sex
- Not sharing needles
- Washing your hands well
- Not using another person's razor or toothbrush
- Using caution when getting tattoos or piercings