Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis?
Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis can be cause by medications, herbal remedies, chemicals, toxins, alcohol, autoimmune diseases, and viruses.

Hepatitis A
Hepatitis A is liver disease caused by a specific type of virus called hepatitis A virus (HAV).

Who is at risky to hepatitis A?
Everyone is at risk to become in contact with the hepatitis A virus. Individuals at higher risk are people who travel to less develop countries where hepatitis A is common (Africa, China, the Mediterranean basin, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central and South American, Mexico and parts of the Caribbean), men who have sex with men, injecting-drug users, people with clotting-factor disorders, people with chronic liver disease and children living in communities where hepatitis A is high.

Diagnosis
Hepatitis A infection is diagnosed by blood test. A blood test called antibody test will determine the presence of the hepatitis A antibody IgM anti-HAV. This test also confirms that your immune system has produced antibodies to the hepatitis A virus. The presence of another antibody called IgM, distinguish recent hepatitis A infection from past infection or vaccination. In addition, another antibody called IgG anti-HAV, which also appears early in the course of hepatitis A infection, remains detectable in the blood for life and protects you from future exposure to the hepatitis A virus (HAV).

Symptoms
After exposure to hepatitis A virus, symptoms usually begin 2 to 6 weeks after (average 30 days). The symptoms of the acute phase vary among age group. Most infants and children under 6 years old have mild, nonspecific symptoms. In adolescents and adults, 75 percent have symptoms flu-like symptoms such as; chills, fever, aching muscles, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) and dark urine.

In rare circumstance, 1 percent, HAV can cause a sudden and severe liver complication called fulminant hepatitis, which can lead to liver failure. Although most people recover within 3 weeks, about 15% of infected people may experience prolonged illness or relapsing symptoms over a 6–9 month period. HAV is rarely fatal (0.3% in the general population) and has no chronic (long-term) complication.

Transmission
Hepatitis A virus (HAV) is transmitted primarily through oral-fecal (shit) from person to person through rimming (anal-oral sex), contaminated food or water handled by infected employees working in restaurant, swallowing contaminated water or ice, and by sharing contaminated needles.

Treatment
There is no treatment for hepatitis A. Rest, a low fat diet, and plenty of fluids are recommended. Avoid drugs and alcohol, these can worsen the liver disease. Most people recover from the infection.

Prevention
There are many ways to prevent the spread of hepatitis A:

1) Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing a diaper, and before preparing and eating food. Good personal hygiene and proper sanitation can help to prevent hepatitis A.

2) Immune globulin (IG) shot is a synthetic hepatitis A antibody preparation. It is recommended for short-term protection. Immune globulin must be given 2 to 3 months prior to a possible exposure to the hepatitis A virus (HAV) or within 2 weeks after exposure. Immune globulin (IG) is generally safe and well tolerated. Side effects of IG are rare, but they may include swelling, hives, and other allergic reactions. IG is effective 80-90% of the time. See your doctor about your need for a dose of immune globulin (IG).

3) The hepatitis A vaccines currently licensed in the United States are HAVRIX® and VAQTA®. Once you receive one of the two vaccines, your body will produce antibodies that will protect you from getting the hepatitis A virus. The HAVRIX vaccine is given To children & adolescents 2-18 years in 3 doses usually in the muscle of the upper arm. The first shot should be followed by a second shot one month later and the third shot six to twelve months later. In adults > 18 years old, the vaccine is given in 2 doses at 0, 6-12 months. The VAQTA vaccine is given to children and adolescents 2-18 years old in 2 doses at 0, 6-18 months and in adults >18 years old as 2 doses at 0, 6-18 months. Twinrix is another vaccine option that combines two vaccines in one (hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine) against both hepatitis A and hepatitis B viruses. Twinrix is generally well tolerated. In clinical trials the most common side effects included soreness at the injection site, headache, and fatigue. If you receive this vaccine, you may have to get vaccinated every 10 years.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends hepatitis A vaccine for travelers to countries with high rates of hepatitis A, people living in communities with high rates of hepatitis A, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, laboratory personnel who work with hepatitis A virus, people with chronic hepatitis B, & C, injecting drug users, people with clotting factor disorders, such as hemophiliacs and anyone else who wants protection against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A and HIV
Studies have shown that people with HIV tend to have more severe symptoms. The hepatitis A and B vaccines are recommended for these people. In HIV positive individuals, the vaccine's effectiveness depends on the CD4 count. The vaccines seem to be safe as far as its impact to induced an increase on HIV viral load.

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