



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Hepatitis E

What is hepatitis E?

Hepatitis (hep-ah-TY-tiss) E is an inflammation of the liver caused by the Hepatitis E virus, which is found in the stool of an infected person. Hepatitis E rarely causes long-term liver damage or death, but can cause very serious infection in pregnant women. Hepatitis E is rare in the United States and is almost always related to travel to a country where hepatitis E is common.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis E?

Symptoms usually begin an average of 40 days after exposure, but can begin after 15-60 days. Death from hepatitis E is rare, but mortality occurs in 10-30 percent of pregnant women in their third trimester. People are most contagious from about 2 weeks before symptoms begin until 2 weeks after. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Tiredness
- Stomach pain
- Joint pain
- Dark urine
- Pale, clay-colored stool
- Loss of appetite
- Yellowing of skin and eyeballs (jaundice)

How is hepatitis E spread?

Hepatitis E virus is passed in stool, and people become infected by having contact with the stool of an infected person. Contaminated drinking water is the most common source of infection. For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions.

Who is at risk for getting hepatitis E?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness. Persons are at risk for hepatitis E infection if they:

- Drink or swallow untreated water.
- Eat food prepared by an infected person.
- Eating raw produce or raw shellfish (e.g., oysters).
- Traveling to countries where hepatitis E is common and where there is little clean water or proper sewage disposal.
- Exposure to the stool or blood of an infected person.

How do I know if I have hepatitis E?

A person having diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours or having jaundice should consult a health care provider immediately. The health care provider may collect a blood sample to test for hepatitis E.

How is hepatitis E treated?

There is no treatment for hepatitis E other than treating symptoms. People who have had hepatitis E develop lifelong immunity and cannot get it again. There is no vaccine to prevent infection.

How is hepatitis E prevented?

In general, hepatitis E can be prevented by strictly adhering to the following guidelines:

- Wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom; after swimming; and before, during, and after food preparation.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Use treated water for washing, cooking, and drinking.
- Do not change diapers near recreational water.
- When traveling outside the United States, drink bottled drinks, do not eat uncooked produce unless you peel them yourself, do not eat foods or drinks from street vendors, and do not drink or eat local water or ice.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/E/index.htm>

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

This page was last reviewed June 2016.