

# Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a viral liver disease that can cause mild to severe illness. Globally, there are an estimated 1.4 million cases of hepatitis A every year. Unlike hepatitis B and C, hepatitis A infection does not cause chronic liver disease and is rarely fatal, but can cause debilitating symptoms and lead to acute liver failure, which is associated with high mortality.

Hepatitis A virus is transmitted primarily via the faecal/oral route through ingestion of contaminated food and water, or through direct contact with an infectious person. Improved sanitation and vaccination are the most effective ways to combat the disease.

Several hepatitis vaccines are available internationally. Both inactivated and live attenuated hepatitis A vaccines are highly immunogenic and immunization will generate long-lasting, possibly life-long, protection against hepatitis A in children as well as in adults.

Vaccination against hepatitis A should be part of a comprehensive plan for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis, including measures to improve hygiene and sanitation and measures for outbreak control.

WHO recommends that vaccination against hepatitis A virus be integrated into the national immunization schedule for children aged 1 year or older, if indicated on the basis of local factors, including incidence of acute hepatitis A, level of endemicity, and consideration of cost-effectiveness.

The use of hepatitis A vaccine, rather than passive prophylaxis with immune globulin, is recommended for pre-exposure prophylaxis for individuals considered at increased risk, such as travellers to areas of higher hepatitis A endemicity, men who have sex with men, and people with chronic liver diseases. The vaccine can also be given as post-exposure prophylaxis to close contacts of acute cases of hepatitis A.