

Viral Hepatitis

Hepatitis is a disease of the liver most often caused by a virus. In severe cases, it can damage the liver. There are different types of hepatitis.

Most cases of hepatitis can be spread to other people. It is spread by sexual contact or by contact with stool, urine, blood or other body fluids of an infected person.

Signs

Common signs include:

- Body aches, weakness, tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Dark urine
- Light colored stool
- Fever
- Headache
- A dull ache in the right upper side of the abdomen
- Yellow color to the skin called jaundice
- Itchy skin
- Joint pain and rashes

Some people with hepatitis have no signs.

Your Care

A blood test will show your doctor what type of hepatitis you have. Your treatment will be based on your type of hepatitis and may include:

- Rest.
- Take only the medicines ordered by your doctor. Other medicines can affect your liver.
- Do not drink alcohol since it can further damage your liver.
- Do not smoke. Avoid second hand smoke.
- Eat small portions of low fat foods to decrease nausea.
- Apply cream often to itchy, dry skin.

How to Prevent the Spread of Hepatitis

If you have hepatitis or are caring for a person with hepatitis:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Be sure to wash your hands after contact with blood, stool, urine or saliva. Hand washing must always be done before fixing and eating food.
- The person with hepatitis should not handle food other people will eat. Throw away his or her leftovers.
- Wash dishes well with hot, soapy water and rinse.
- Wash clothing, sheets and towels used by the person with hepatitis separately.
- The person with hepatitis should not have sexual contact, including kissing, until his or her doctor says that it is safe.

Call your doctor if you have:

- Vomiting where you cannot keep down any fluids
- Vomit that is bloody or looks like coffee grounds
- Black bowel movements
- Changes in behavior
- Increased bruising