

Addressing Food Handlers' Concerns about Hepatitis A

In Los Angeles County, hepatitis A cases have increased among homeless people and drug users. Hepatitis A can be spread through food or drinks that have been contaminated with the virus. If you are a food handler it's important to take steps to prevent the spread of hepatitis A.

1. What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious (spreads person-to-person) liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (germ). Mild cases can last a few weeks while severe cases can last several months.

2. How does hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A spreads by putting something in your mouth (object, food, or drink) that has been in contact with the feces (poop) of an infected person. Hepatitis A can be spread by:

- Not washing hands after contact with infected feces
- Having sexual contact with infected partner(s)
- Consuming food or drinks that are contaminated by the virus

Infected food handlers are at-risk for spreading hepatitis A to others if they work while infected with hepatitis A and don't practice good handwashing.

3. What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Not everyone shows symptoms. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 2-6 weeks after infection and can include:

- Fever
- Vomiting
- Grey stool
- Feeling tired
- Stomach pain
- Joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Dark urine
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes
- Nausea
- (pee)

4. How is hepatitis A treated?

Treatment includes rest, good nutrition, fluids, and medical monitoring. Some people may need to be hospitalized. Most people who get hepatitis A recover completely and don't have lasting liver damage. It's important to stop handling food immediately and see a doctor if you have symptoms of hepatitis A.

5. How can food handlers protect themselves from infection?

The best way to protect against hepatitis A infection is to get vaccinated. Public Health recommends that all food handlers working in venues that provide food to homeless people get vaccinated. Call 2-1-1 for local clinics in your area that provide free vaccines. All food handlers should follow these prevention steps:

- Wear gloves when preparing food
- Don't come to work while sick, especially if you have diarrhea
- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water after using the restroom and before preparing or serving food.



6 steps of handwashing:

Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to prevent the spread of hepatitis A.

1. Wet hands
2. Soap
3. Scrub
4. Rinse
5. Dry
6. Turn off water using a paper towel

Where can the public go for more information?

**Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health**
Dial 2-1-1

**California Department of
Public Health**
916-558-1784

**Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention**
800-CDC-INFO
800-232-4636