### Symptoms

Viral hepatitis symptoms are similar no matter which type of hepatitis a person has. If symptoms occur, the individual may experience any or all of the following: jaundice, fever, loss of appetite, fatigue, dark urine, jaundice, abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. Very rarely, a new case (acute) of viral hepatitis can cause liver failure and death. Sometimes in these instances a liver transplant (if a liver is available) can save a life. Note: Symptoms are less common in children than adults and people who have HCV infection are less likely to experience symptoms.

### Incubation period

- **Hepatitis A**: 15 to 50 days. There is no chronic (long-term) infection. Once you have had hepatitis A you cannot get it again. About 15% of people infected with HAV will have prolonged illness or relapsing symptoms over a 6 – 9 month period.
- **Hepatitis B**: 45 to 180 days, average 90 days. Chronic infection occurs in 90% of infants infected at birth; 30% of children infected at age 1-5 years; 6% of persons infected after age 5 years.
- **Hepatitis C**: 14 to 180 days, average 45 days. Chronic infection: 75-85% of infected persons. Chronic liver disease: 70% of chronically infected persons. In the U.S., 8-10,000 people die each year from HCV. People who have chronic HCV infection have a much higher risk of liver failure (cirrhosis) and liver cancer. Chronic HCV-related liver disease is the leading indication for liver transplant.

### Treatment

- **Hepatitis A**: No treatment is available. Avoid alcohol. It can worsen liver disease.
- **Hepatitis B**: HBV-infected persons should have a medical evaluation for liver disease every 6-12 months. Alpha-interferon and lamivudine are the two drugs licensed for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis B. These drugs are effective in up to 40% of patients. Liver transplant is the last resort, but livers are not always available. Avoid alcohol. It can worsen liver disease.
- **Hepatitis C**: HCV-positive persons should have a medical evaluation for liver disease every 6-12 months. Interferon, pegylated interferon, and ribavirin are the only drugs licensed for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis C. Interferon can be taken alone or in combination with ribavirin. Combination therapy is currently the treatment of choice and can eliminate the virus in up to 40% or patients. Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and ask your doctor if you need hepatitis B vaccine as well. Avoid alcohol. It can worsen liver disease.

### Prevention

- **Hepatitis A**: Vaccine is the best protection. It is recommended for people 2 yrs of age who are in risk groups for HAV infection. It is recommended as a routine vaccination for children living in certain states and geographic areas where hepatitis A occurs at consistently higher rates than average.
- **Hepatitis B**: Vaccine is the best protection. Routine vaccination is recommended for all persons 0-18 years of age, and for persons of all ages who are in risk groups for HAV infection. For optimal protection all babies should be given their first dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth before leaving the hospital.
- **Hepatitis C**: There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C. HCV can be spread by sex, but this is rare. If you are having sex with more than one steady partner, use condoms correctly and every time to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. (The efficacy of latex condoms in preventing infection with HCV is unknown, but their proper use may reduce transmission.) You should also get vaccinated against hepatitis B.

### More information to help you prevent hepatitis B and hepatitis C

- **Don't share personal care items that might have blood on them, such as razors, toothbrushes, and washcloths.**
- **Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools or dye have someone else’s blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good sterilization practices.**
- **Health care and public safety workers should always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps. In addition, they should be vaccinated against hepatitis B.**