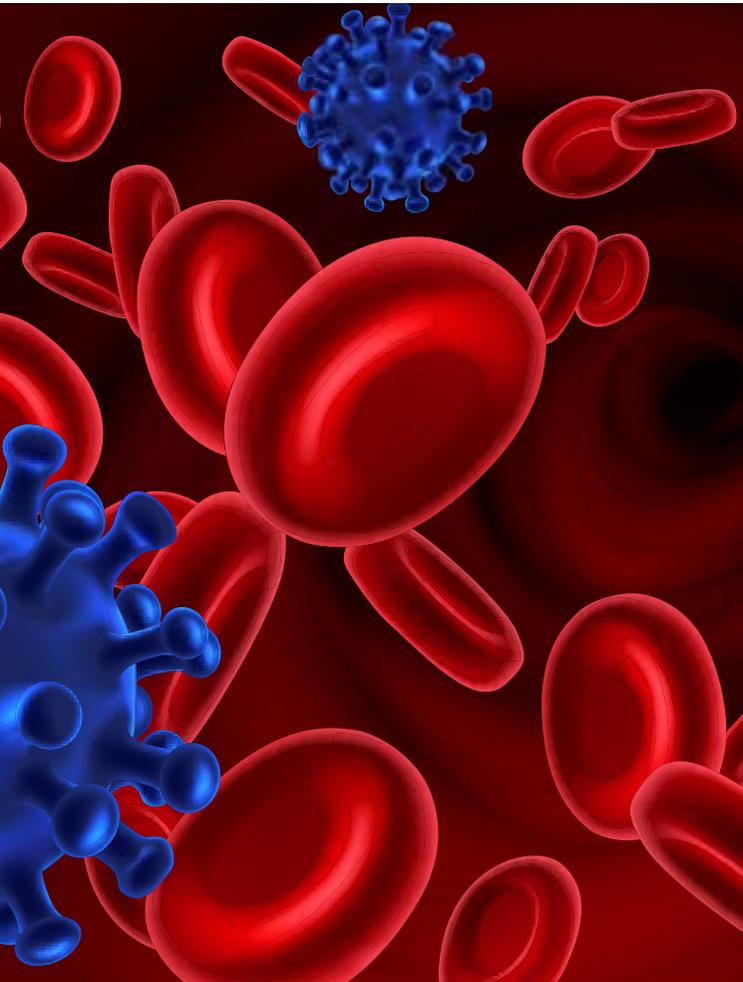


HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) can cause a short-term (acute) infection which may become a long term (chronic) infection. HCV is transmitted mainly through contact with contaminated blood. Sexual transmission of HCV is possible, but it is rare. Hepatitis C can also be transmitted from mother to baby.

The incubation period is approximately two weeks to six months. Most people with hepatitis C usually have minimal or no symptoms. Approximately 75-85% of people with acute hepatitis C infection will develop chronic infection. Chronic, untreated infection can lead to liver scarring (cirrhosis) and liver cancer.

People with chronic infection can receive treatment, which may cure the infection. There is no vaccine or post exposure prophylaxis available to protect against hepatitis C infection.



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Your consulting pathologists

VIRAL HEPATITIS



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VIRAL HEPATITIS

INTRODUCTION

Hepatitis simply means inflammation of the liver (the suffix “itis” means inflammation and “hepa” means liver). There are many different causes of hepatitis, including infection with viruses such as hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis can also be caused by certain medication, toxins and alcohol.

SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS

Symptoms of viral hepatitis may include fever, loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting and abdominal pain. This may be followed by dark urine, light coloured stools, joint pain, and jaundice (yellow coloured skin and eyes). Viral hepatitis may also have no symptoms at all.

HEPATITIS A

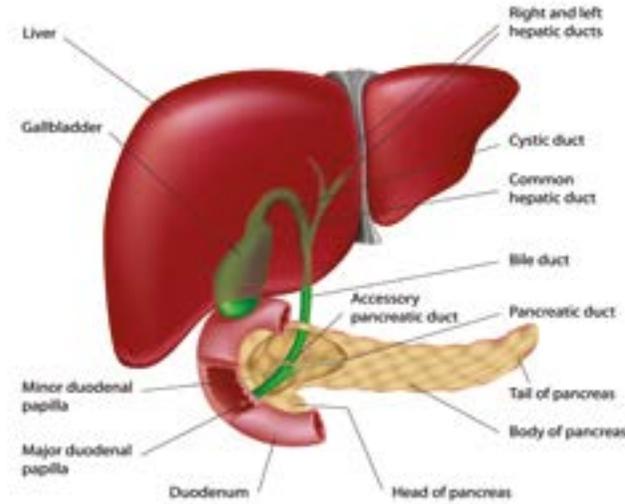
Hepatitis A virus (HAV) causes a short-term (acute) illness, which usually lasts a few weeks up to two- three months. Hepatitis A is passed in the stool of infected people, which means that water and food can get contaminated where sewerage disposal is poor.

Someone with hepatitis A may also infect others by not washing their hands properly after going to the bathroom and then for example preparing and contaminating food. The incubation period (time between being exposed to the virus, until developing symptoms) is approximately 15-45 days. The infection may have no symptoms, or vary from mild to life-threatening. Rarely, hepatitis A can cause severe liver damage that may lead to death.

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A infection. HAV can easily be diagnosed by doing a blood test. After the acute illness, most people will recover with lifelong immunity against the infection, meaning that a person cannot get infected with HAV again. Close, non-immune personal contacts of a person with hepatitis A infection require what is referred to as ‘post-exposure prophylaxis’ or PEP. This involves taking certain medication after being exposed to an infection in order to prevent the exposed person from becoming infected. Hepatitis A PEP may consist of hepatitis A vaccine and/or immunoglobulins (antibodies) depending on the age of the exposed person, as well as when they were exposed.

Hepatitis A vaccination is highly recommended for all non-immune travellers, especially people who are immunocompromised or have underlying liver disease before travelling to areas where hepatitis A is common

LIVER, GALLBLADDER, PANCREAS AND BILE PASSAGE



HEPATITIS B

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) can cause a short-term (acute) infection which may become a life-long (chronic) infection. Hepatitis B is passed from person to person through blood and other bodily fluids. Most people become infected through unprotected sexual contact, sharing of contaminated needles during drug use and transmission from mother to baby.

The incubation period is approximately 45-160 days. Most people with acute infection do not require any specific treatment and will recover from the infection within about six months. However, approximately one out of every 20 adults with acute hepatitis B infection will develop long term (chronic) infection.

A person with chronic hepatitis B infection may go on to develop liver scarring (cirrhosis) or liver cancer. People who develop chronic infection may require treatment with antiviral medication. Hepatitis B is easily diagnosed by doing a blood test.

Hepatitis B can be prevented by means of a vaccine. Children in South Africa have been routinely vaccinated against hepatitis B since 1995.

Non-immune persons that have been exposed to hepatitis B infection require post-exposure prophylaxis which may consist of hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immunoglobulins (antibodies).

COMPARISON BETWEEN HEPATITIS A, HEPATITIS B AND HEPATITIS C VIRAL INFECTIONS

	HEPATITIS A	HEPATITIS B	HEPATITIS C
Transmission	Contaminated food and water	Contact with blood or bodily fluids	Contact with blood or bodily fluids
Incubation (time between exposure to infection and the first symptoms developing)	15 to 45 days	45 to 160 days	2 weeks to 6 months
Disease duration	Short term (acute) with full recovery	Acute which may recover completely or become chronic	Acute which may recover completely or become chronic
Lab testing available	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is a vaccine available?	Yes	Yes	No
Treatment	None	Antiviral medication	Antiviral medication
Post-exposure prophylaxis	Vaccination and/or immunoglobulin (antibodies)	Vaccination and hepatitis B immunoglobulin (antibodies)	None available