

Hepatitis A

It is one form of viral hepatitis caused by Hepatitis A virus. In Hong Kong, there are about 250-500 reported cases of Hepatitis A infection each year.

Clinical features:

Some infected persons may be asymptomatic. Others may have:

- Poor appetite
- Lethargy
- Nausea, vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Abdominal discomfort
- Jaundice
- Tea-colored urine

Mode of transmission:

It is transmitted by faecal - oral route through contaminated food, drinks or shellfish.

Incubation period:

The incubation period ranges from 15 days to 50 days.

Management:

Patients with Hepatitis A should be isolated. Careful hygienic measures including hand washing, careful disposal of stool and contaminated diapers should be followed. The treatment of acute hepatitis is largely supportive and includes bed rest, hydration and adequate dietary intake. Patients should be kept out of school until at least 1 week after onset of jaundice or as advised by doctors.

Prevention:

- Hepatitis A vaccine is available for people at high risk of contracting Hepatitis A. They include those traveling to Hepatitis A endemic areas, those who are in the habit of eating raw or partially cooked shellfish.
- Maintain good hygiene when handling food
- Drinking water should be boiled
- Avoid high risk food like shellfish, raw food or semi-cooked food
- Purchase fresh food from reliable source
- Cook food thoroughly. Hepatitis A virus is killed by cooking at 100 degree Celsius for at least 5 minutes

Hepatitis B

It is a form of viral hepatitis caused by Hepatitis B virus. It is estimated that 300 million people worldwide are hepatitis B carriers and 75% of these individuals reside in Asia. Hong Kong, being an endemic area, has a hepatitis B carrier rate of about 10%.

Clinical features: Majority of infected young children and 40-70% of infected adults will not develop any symptoms. Others may have:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea / vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Jaundice
- Tea-colored urine
- Pale stool

Approximately 5-10% of adults and 95% of perinatally infected infants will become chronic carriers. Up to 25% of the carriers may eventually die of chronic liver diseases, principally liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Mode of transmission: It is transmitted in the following ways:

1. Mother to infant transmission at or around the time of delivery
2. Blood contact
 - By direct contact with contaminated blood
 - By sharing contaminated objects or instruments e.g. toothbrushes, needles
 - By transfusion of contaminated blood
3. Sexual contact

Incubation period: The incubation period ranges from 45-160 days.

Management:

The treatment of acute hepatitis is largely supportive and includes bed rest, hydration and adequate dietary intake. Alcohol consumption should be avoided. Patients should take precautions to avoid infecting others e.g. practice safe sex, avoid sharing of needles.

Prevention:

- All babies born in Hong Kong are vaccinated against hepatitis B. The first dose is given in hospitals while the second and third doses are given at 1 and 6 months in
- Maternal and Child Health Centres. For babies born to hepatitis B carrier mothers, an additional hepatitis B immunoglobulin is given within first day of life to prevent mother - infant transmission.
- Avoid sharing of personal items like razors, toothbrushes, needles.
- Wear gloves while handling blood and body fluids.
- Disinfect objects contaminated with blood using 1:49 household bleach
- Practice safe sex

This advice is for general reference only. Please consult the doctor in case of doubt.