



Hepatitis E

What is hepatitis E?

Hepatitis E is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis E virus. Hepatitis E is not common in North Dakota or in the United States.

Who is at risk for hepatitis E?

Anyone can get hepatitis E, but those at greater risk include travelers to developing countries, particularly parts of Mexico and countries in South Asia and North Africa. Most outbreaks in developing countries have been associated with contaminated drinking water. Hepatitis E is more common among people ages 15 to 40. Rare cases have occurred in the United States among people with no history of travel to countries where hepatitis E is common.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis E?

People with hepatitis E may not have symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they are similar to those of other types of viral hepatitis and may include tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, vomiting, dark urine or jaundice (i.e., yellowing of skin or whites of eyes). The severity of symptoms increases with age. Hepatitis E is more severe among pregnant women, especially in the third trimester.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may appear 15 days to 64 days after exposure, but symptoms usually appear within 26 to 42 days.

How is hepatitis E spread?

Hepatitis E virus is found in the stools (feces) of infected people. The virus is spread by eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Transmission from person to person occurs less commonly than with hepatitis A virus.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

It is unknown how long a person is able to spread the disease. However, the virus can be found in stool (feces) for at least two weeks.

How is a person diagnosed?

A health-care professional can make a positive diagnosis using a blood test that looks for antibodies that fight the virus.

What is the treatment?

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person once the symptoms appear; the only treatment is supportive care.

Does past infection make a person immune?

This is unknown.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have hepatitis E?

Yes:

- Children with the disease should be excluded for one week after onset of illness.
- Adults with the illness, especially those who work as food handlers, should be excluded for one week after onset of illness.
- Children should be excluded if they are unable to participate in routine activities, need more care than can be provided by staff, or meet other exclusion criteria, such as fever with behavioral change.

What can be done to prevent the spread of hepatitis E?

The single most effective way to prevent the spread of hepatitis E is careful hand washing after using the bathroom or changing a diaper and before preparing and eating food. Travelers to regions where hepatitis E is common should avoid drinking water (and beverages with ice) of unknown purity, uncooked shellfish, and unpeeled fruits and vegetables that are not peeled or prepared by the traveler.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics. [Section 3, Summaries of Infectious Diseases]. In: Pickering LK, ed. *Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:[page 342]

