HEPATITIS A

What is it?

Hepatitis A is a viral disease which affects the liver. It occurs most often in school children and young adults. It may be known as infectious hepatitis. It is a different disease from Hepatitis B.

How do I know if someone has it?

The illness usually begins with a sudden onset of fever (temperature), feeling unwell, loss of appetite, nausea and stomach pain which is followed within a few days by jaundice - a yellow discolouration of the whites of the eyes and often the skin. Young Children may have mild infections without jaundice.

Is it infectious?

Yes, the infection is most commonly spread from person to person by infected faeces (stools). The faeces are infectious for two weeks before the person becomes ill and for about a week after the jaundice appears. Children without symptoms may be infectious for several weeks. People travelling abroad to developing countries where sanitation is poor are at risk of becoming infected. They should be immunised before travelling.

What is the incubation period?

Illness may appear between 2 to 6 weeks after contact with an infected person.

Is there any treatment?

There is no specific treatment, and most people can be looked after at home.

What should I do if someone has the illness?

- Seek advice from your GP. Hepatitis A is a notifiable disease. Close contacts can be protected from infection by immunisation or an injection of antibodies (gammaglobulin).

- Make sure that there is very strict personal hygiene; hands must be washed after using the toilet and before handling food. Toilets (handles and seats) must be kept clean with bleach diluted 1 part to 10 parts water.

- In institutions use individual disposable towels or electric hand dryers and discourage classroom cooking.

How soon can someone return to school or work?

A person should stay away until they feel well and at least 5 days after the onset of jaundice.