**Hepatitis A**

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. This can be caused by alcohol and some drugs, but usually it is the result of a viral infection. There are many types of virus which can cause hepatitis. Each of these viruses acts differently.

The hepatitis A virus (HAV) is a common infection in many parts of the world. It is possible to become infected through eating or drinking contaminated food or water. The virus is found in faeces. It can be passed on if even a tiny amount of faeces from a person with hepatitis A comes into contact with another person's mouth. This means the virus can also be passed on sexually through practices such as rimming. Personal hygiene, with careful hand washing, can minimise the risk of the virus being passed on.

**Signs and symptoms**

People may have no symptoms at all, but they can still pass on the virus to others. Symptoms may include:

- a short, mild, flu-like illness
- nausea and vomiting
- diarrhoea
- loss of appetite
- weight loss
- jaundice (yellow skin and whites of eyes, darker yellow urine and pale faeces)
- itchy skin

Some people may need to be admitted to hospital.
Further information
For further information, visit the British Liver Trust website at www.britishlivertrust.org.uk, or write to British Liver Trust, Ransomes Europark, Ipswich, IP3 9QG. Information on hepatitis A is also available from NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

This factsheet is one of a series which give information on the following range of infections and diseases: bacterial vaginosis, chlamydia, cystitis, genital herpes, genital warts, gonorrhoea, hepatitis (A, B and C), non-specific urethritis, penile cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), prostate cancer, public lice, scabies, syphilis, testicular cancer, thrush and trichomonas vaginals.

Free copies of any of these factsheets are available from GP surgeries, NHS sexual health (GUM) clinics, or your local health promotion unit (in the phone book under your local Health Authority).