



Hepatitis A

Fact Sheet

Introduction

Hepatitis A is a viral liver disease which affects both children and adults. The severity of the disease could vary from mild to severe. It is a highly contagious disease and can go into outbreak situations easily if the appropriate measures are not taken swiftly.

Clinical Features

Adults have more symptoms and signs than children and the worse outcomes of the disease also more common in adults. Jaundice (yellow colour discolouration of the skin and the eyes) is the most common symptom which appears among 70% of the adults and while only noticeable in 10% of children. The other symptoms/signs include fever, malaise, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, nausea, abdominal pain / discomfort and dark coloured urine.

Diagnosis

Hepatitis A is clinically indistinguishable from other types of acute viral hepatitis. The diagnosis is made by detection of the Hepatitis A virus specific immunoglobulin (IgM antibodies) in serum.

Mode of Transmission

The disease primarily transmitted by ingestion of contaminated food and water (faeco-oral mode). However it could spread through direct and close physical contact of an infected person too.

Incubation Period

Incubation period is around 14-28 days.

Preventive Measures

Improvement of the sanitary facilities, adhere to stringent food safety practices and immunization are the main pillars of the prevention.

Sanitary facilities

- Adequate supply of safe drinking water (boiled to 100°C for at least 1 minute)
- Always use a toilet for defecation
- Proper disposal of faeces of small children
- Wash hands with soap according to the proper techniques before eating, after defecation and before preparation of food.
- Avoid close contact with Hepatitis A patients. If you are to provide care to a patient, always wash hands with soap according to the proper techniques after handling the patient. Especially

when looking after a small child with the disease wash your hands with soap each time you change the nappies or diapers. This could prevent spreading the disease to other children as well as to the caregiver.

Food safety practices

- Always clean the fruits or green leaves / vegetable (if using freshly) thoroughly before consuming.
- Cook adequate amount of time.
- Keep the cooked food, washed fruits and other ready to eat foods covered to avoid contaminating by mechanical vectors. (eg. flies..)

Hepatitis A Vaccine

- Safe and effective killed vaccine is available for long-lasting protection.
- Two doses (6 months apart) are required for full protection.
- Not provided under the National Programme of Immunization.
- Not recommended for children less than 1 year
- Refer to the Immunization hand book
(http://epid.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/Publication/Immunization_Guide_2012.pdf)

Management of the outbreak situations

- Visit the patient's house as soon as possible once the notification is received.
- Look for more patients with the symptoms around the patient's household and refer them for immediate medical attention. (Hepatitis A is tend to occur in clusters. Though it is hard to distinguish Hep A. from Hep. B, only by signs and symptoms, epidemiologically we can differentiate them by exploring this clustering effect.)
- Confirm the outbreak situation and take immediate measures to control the outbreak
- Identify the source of infection.
- Super-Chlorinate (double the usual amount of the Chlorine) the water sources at least for a period of one month from the starting of the outbreak.
- Educate the community (including school children and factory workers) about the value of drinking boiled cool water, hand washing, proper disposal of excreta and clean the fruits and green leaves thoroughly before consuming.
- Inspect the food handling establishments (Hotels, bakeries, fast food outlets...) in the area
- Send food and water samples for investigation from the possible contaminated sites
- Since the disease has a long incubation period all the preventive activities also need to be continued persistently for a long period.