

**What is hepatitis E?**

Hepatitis E is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis E virus that usually results in a self-limited, acute infection. It does not lead to a chronic infection. While rare in the United States, hepatitis E is common in many parts of the developing world.

**Where is hepatitis E most common?**

Hepatitis E is most common in developing countries with inadequate environmental sanitation. Hepatitis E epidemics have been reported in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. Some epidemics of hepatitis E have involved tens of thousands of persons affected over a short period of time. People living in refugee camps or overcrowded temporary housing after natural disasters can be at particular risk. Hepatitis E is believed to be uncommon in the United States. When hepatitis E infection does occur, it is usually the result of travel to a developing country where hepatitis E is endemic. However, rare cases have been reported among persons with no history of travel to hepatitis E-hyperendemic countries. Furthermore, some recent studies have found a high prevalence of antibodies to HEV in the general population.

**What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis E?**

Persons with hepatitis E virus infection commonly have abdominal pain, loss of appetite, dark urine, pale-colored stools, fever, enlarged liver, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), nausea, and vomiting. Less frequently, persons with hepatitis E virus infection have joint pain, diarrhea, itchy skin, and hives. Hepatitis E does not lead to a chronic infection. Most people with hepatitis E recover completely. The overall fatality rate is  $\leq 4\%$ . However, for pregnant women, hepatitis E is more serious, and the disease is fatal in 15-25% of pregnant women, particularly those in their third trimester.

**How is hepatitis E diagnosed?**

Talk to your doctor or someone from your local health department if you suspect that you have been exposed to hepatitis E or any type of viral hepatitis. A physician would diagnose hepatitis E virus infection in a patient through a physical exam, assessment of the patient's symptoms and history (especially travel history), and exclusion of other possible causes of hepatitis (like hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C viruses). There is no commercial test available in the United States to diagnose hepatitis E infection.

**How is hepatitis E virus transmitted?**

Hepatitis E virus is spread from person-to-person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis E. This type of transmission is called "fecal-oral." For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions. Thus, outbreaks are usually associated with contaminated water supply in countries with poor sanitation.

**How soon after exposure will symptoms appear?**

When symptoms occur, they usually develop 15 to 64 days (average: 26-42 days) after exposure.

**How is hepatitis E treated?**

Hepatitis E usually resolves on its own without treatment. There is no specific antiviral therapy for hepatitis E. Physicians may offer supportive therapy. Patients are typically advised to rest, get adequate nutrition and fluids, and avoid alcohol. Hospitalization is sometimes required in severe cases and should be considered for pregnant women.

**Is there a vaccine to prevent hepatitis E virus infection?**

There is currently no FDA-approved vaccine for hepatitis E. However, several studies are in progress for the development of an effective vaccine to prevent hepatitis E. A vaccine to prevent hepatitis E was recently approved for use in China, but it is not available globally.

**For more information, please visit these websites:**

- CDC Hepatitis E: [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hev](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hev)
- CDC Travelers' Health Hepatitis E: [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2020/travel-related-infectious-diseases/hepatitis-e](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2020/travel-related-infectious-diseases/hepatitis-e)