

VIRAL HEPATITIS



■ ■ ■ Description

Viral hepatitis is an infection that mainly affects the liver, causing inflammation. The type of hepatitis is determined by the virus responsible for the infection, most commonly hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. Hepatitis A is an acute infection with no long-term consequences. In contrast, hepatitis B and C can be chronic illnesses jeopardizing the career and life of the athlete.

■ ■ ■ Risk Factors

Hepatitis A is spread from the fecal to oral route, mainly from contaminated water or by eating shellfish taken from contaminated waters, and through improper hand washing. Hepatitis B is spread through contact with infected bodily fluids, including semen and blood. Hepatitis C is also spread through exposure to infected blood and less commonly through unprotected sex.

■ ■ ■ Common Signs and Symptoms

- Asymptomatic flulike symptoms
- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- General body aches
- Fatigue
- Itchy hives
- Painful joints
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Yellowing of the skin
- Yellowing of the eyes
- Pain just below the ribs on your right side
- Tenderness of the right upper belly

■ ■ ■ Risk Increases With

- Contaminated syringes
- Contaminated needles
- Handling other people's blood
- Improperly sterilized instruments used in tattoo and piercing establishments
- Blood transfusions

■ ■ ■ Preventive Measures

- Drink only water known to be clean or purified.
- Wash hands before meals.
- Reduce exposure to other people's blood by using gloves, goggles, and masks.

- Do not have unprotected sex (use condoms).
- Avoid tattoos or body piercing; if you have these, make sure the instruments are properly sterilized.
- Avoid other sources of contaminated needles.
- Get hepatitis A vaccination and hepatitis B vaccinations.
- Gamma globulin shot may prevent infection.

■ ■ ■ Course of Disease

- Persons with hepatitis may be asymptomatic for up to 6 months after infection.
- Symptoms usually lasts 1 to 6 weeks, followed by complete recovery.
- Relapses can occur and may be triggered by alcohol and other infections.
- Relapses are usually milder than the initial infection.
- Recovery from hepatitis A usually takes 4 to 8 weeks and rarely has lasting effects, such as permanent liver damage.

■ ■ ■ Possible Complications

Up to 35% to 50% of people infected with hepatitis C and up to 10% of people infected with hepatitis B develop chronic (ongoing) hepatitis (inflammation lasting longer than 6 months). Other complications can include:

- Relapses
- Cirrhosis (destruction and scarring) of the liver
- Liver failure
- Increased risk for liver cancer

■ ■ ■ General Treatment Considerations

Initial treatment includes rest and a healthy diet. You should avoid alcohol and certain medicines that are cleared by the liver for at least 6 months. Antiviral drugs, such as interferon, may be used for some types of viral hepatitis. Women should avoid becoming pregnant while taking the antiviral drugs. Generally you should not participate in much activity until clinical symptoms and laboratory tests return to normal. Eat small, balanced meals, even when you feel nauseous. Some foods may not appeal to you, especially in the early stages of the disease. Soda, juices, and hard candy may help you feel less nauseous. As your symptoms improve, you may gradually increase your level of activity, but you should avoid strenuous exercise for at least 6 months. For participation sports with a higher risk of infecting others, markers for hepatitis should be negative before returning to play.

Notes:

(Up to 4400 characters only)

Notes and suggestions