

FACTSHEET 5 – Hepatitis E

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What Is Hepatitis E?

Hepatitis E is a virus that can infect humans and cause inflammation of the liver (Hepatitis). Infection with the virus usually produces only mild disease. The Hepatitis E virus (HEV) is a relatively uncommon cause of viral hepatitis in the United Kingdom.

What Are The Symptoms?

Symptoms of Hepatitis E include yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), darkening of the urine and pale stools, which may or may not be accompanied by tiredness, abdominal pain and loss of appetite, fever and nausea.

How Long Do The Symptoms Last?

The disease usually clears within 1 to 4 weeks.

How Is Hepatitis E Virus Transmitted?

It is believed that people who develop Hepatitis E while, or just after returning from abroad, usually catch it from contaminated food and water. The source of contamination is faeces shed from other infected people or infected animals.

In the developed world, animals are the source of infection. There is good evidence from Japan and France supporting HEV infection through eating raw/undercooked deer, boar and pig meat. Studies from England have indicated that HEV infection is linked to eating processed pork. In one study, it was found that patients with non-travel associated Hepatitis E were infected by HEV carried by British pigs.

How Long Can You Have The Infection Before Developing Symptoms?

The average incubation period for Hepatitis E is 40 days (range 15 – 60 days).

How Is Hepatitis E Treated?

Most people will clear their infections naturally, no specific treatment is required. It is best for those infected to avoid alcohol during the course of their illness. Individuals with persistent HEV infection may require treatment with antivirals.

Pregnant women should seek advice from their antenatal carer.

Can Hepatitis E Infection Be Prevented?

It is important to cook meat and meat products thoroughly and to practice good hygiene. After contact with an infected person or their soiled articles, hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and warm water and then dried properly.

Currently, there is no available vaccine for Hepatitis E. Travellers to countries where sanitation may be poor are advised to boil all drinking water, including water used for brushing teeth. Bottled water may be used instead of boiled water. Avoid ice, poorly cooked shellfish, uncooked vegetables, salads or unpeeled fruit.

How Can The Spread Of Infection Be Prevented From Someone With Hepatitis E?

The risk of spread of infection is very low in this country and there is no evidence that it can pass from an infected person to another. However, good personal hygiene is recommended. It is important to wash and dry hands after going to the toilet; before preparing or serving food; or before eating meals.