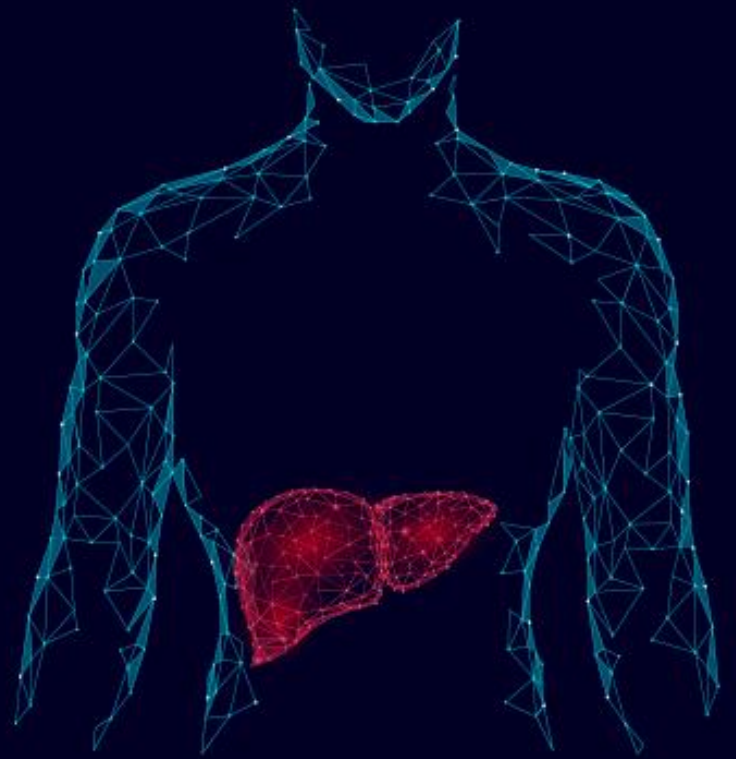


Hepatitis A



HEPATITIS A

By: Director of Gastroenterology Department



Introduction

It is one of the viruses known to cause inflammation of the liver, commonly seen in the younger population. It is highly contagious but does not cause any permanent liver damage. It is usually acquired from the contaminated food or water.

In Pakistan, where most of the regions experience hot and humid weather, people rely upon unhygienic means of hydration and the chances of this infection increase. This is also the case with the school going children.

Another important aspect is some cultural myths associated with this disease i.e. herbal tonics, amulets etc. which have no scientific basis and are of no benefit.

Avoid going to quacks. It can also spread from intimate personnel contact. Severe infection is rare but can be seen in those cases who already have underlying chronic liver disease.

Symptoms

Symptoms appear after you have had the virus for a few weeks. They can include:



Nausea and Vomiting



Loss of appetite



Pain in the upper part of abdomen



Dark urine and Light-coloured stools



Tiredness & Lethargy



Yellowish discoloration of skin and white part of the eye (jaundice)

The duration of symptoms is variable but can be prolonged in some cases which again doesn't mean that a specific drug therapy is needed.

Diagnosis



A specific set of blood test is required initially for the diagnosis as recommended by your doctor. Liver function tests, Hepatitis A antibodies and PT INR are some of the important investigations required for the diagnosis. Frequent monitoring of liver chemistry is not required as it takes time to normalize which is variable and, because it is not directly related to the prognosis of the disease.

Treatment

- No specific treatment exists. Most of the over-the-counter treatments and tonics advocated are of no use. Most patients can be managed at home. Hospital admission is required in those cases who developed altered level of

consciousness or severe derangements in specific blood tests like PT INR. Moreover, jaundice can take some time to improve and is not necessarily a marker of severity of disease.

- Rest and good hydration is the cornerstone in the management. Medicines can be given to improve nausea and vomiting. It is very important to understand that Unnecessary medications including herbal tonics etc. should be avoided as they increase the chances of further liver injury and result in serious outcomes.

Complications

Unlike other hepatitis viruses, hepatitis A does not cause any long-term liver damage. Severe infection that damages the liver is very rare and requires stay in hospital for monitoring & management.

Prevention



Practice good hygiene



Boil water before use



Hand Washing



Proper washing of fruits & vegetables

Vaccination



A Vaccine for prevention of Hepatitis A is available and can be given as per your doctor's recommendation. It consists of one shot followed by a booster dose 6 months later.