

Hepatitis

in Latin America and the Caribbean



What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver commonly caused by hepatitis virus.

Types of viruses and what they can cause

There are five types of hepatitis viruses: A B C D and E

These viruses cause acute and chronic infections and liver inflammation, that may lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and, even, death.

Symptoms

Hepatitis may present as acute or chronic infection.

ACUTE INFECTION

Acute infection may present without symptoms or with limited symptoms. Typical symptoms of hepatitis are jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), dark urine, extreme fatigue, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

CHRONIC INFECTION

Chronic infection may lead to cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer. Hepatitis B and C viruses are the main cause of chronic hepatitis in millions of people.

Transmission

A E Through ingestion of contaminated food or water. Through lack of basic hygiene, such as hand washing before eating or after using the restroom. Hepatitis E can also be transmitted through contaminated blood.

B C D Through contact with infected blood or sexual contact without protection, including oral one. By receipt of contaminated blood through transfusions, organs transplants, invasive procedures (ex. injection or tattoo with reused needle) and mother to newborn transmission.

Prevention

Preventive measures change depending on the type of hepatitis virus and the routes of transmission. However, an easy way to prevent infection is using basic hygiene rules and safe sex, avoid contact with infected blood and ingestion of contaminated food and water; as well as through vaccination (hepatitis A and B).

2002 Health-care workers

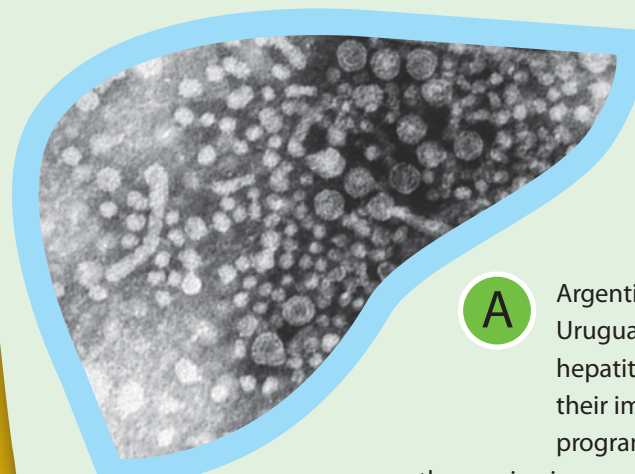
Among health-care workers, 65-80% of hepatitis B and 55% of hepatitis C cases were due to needle stick injuries.

2009 Blood bags

+ 99% were screened for markers of hepatitis B and C viruses

+ 78,000 donations were positive for hepatitis B or C viruses

28th July | World Hepatitis Day



Hepatitis B virus

A Argentina, Panama and Uruguay have introduced hepatitis A vaccine in their immunization programs. The use of the vaccine is recommended in other countries because the risk of outbreaks and cases is increasing among teenagers and adults.

B All countries have officially introduced hepatitis B vaccination in their routine immunization childhood programs.

D Hepatitis D has particular impact in the Amazonian region, especially among indigenous populations.

C Between 7 and 9 million adults are estimated to be infected by hepatitis C virus.

E Little is known about hepatitis E in the region. However, some countries have detected outbreaks and an elevated number of cases in the population.

PAHO key actions

- Establishment of hepatitis national plans and programs in the Americas countries.
- Use of an integrated approach in the fight against hepatitis in the Americas; including prevention, control, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of all hepatitis viruses.
- Commemoration of World Hepatitis Day in the Americas countries.