Hepatitis A
(Viral Infection of the Liver)

Hepatitis A is a viral infection of the liver caused by a germ called the hepatitis A virus (HAV). **The virus enters the body through the mouth by *contaminated* (unclean or impure) food or water.** Once in the body, viral infection begins in the bowel and spreads to the liver causing illness. Most cases of this hepatitis are mild and cause few *symptoms* (problems). In the mild cases, people may not realize they are sick. They may not develop *jaundice* (yellowing of the eyes and skin). The hepatitis can sometimes become severe and last for weeks.

ABOUT HEPATITIS A VIRUS

- Over half the people who become infected with HAV never get sick. There is no evidence of this form of hepatitis progressing to a longstanding form.
- After becoming infected with the HAV, there will be a three to five week incubation period before getting sick. There will be a shedding of the virus in the stool within ten to fourteen days of the infection.
- Because of the passing of viral particles in the stool, good hygiene will help prevent the spread of this disease. Frequent hand washing following use of the bathroom and before handling food or water is encouraged.
- **WARNING:** This infection is contagious. Follow your caregiver's instructions in order to avoid spread of the infection.
- This hepatitis does not progress to cancer of the liver as is common with hepatitis B.
- There is no specific treatment for the disease once the virus has caused infection. Giving human immunoglobulin following exposure will help prevent or lessen the severity of the illness. This dose may be doubled if pregnancy or liver diseases are present.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are unable to eat or drink.
- *Nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach) or vomiting occurs.
- Confusion occurs.
- Jaundice becomes more severe.
- You become very sleepy or have trouble waking up.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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