

What is hepatitis E?

Hepatitis E is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis E virus that usually results in an acute infection. It does not lead to a chronic infection. While rare in the United States, hepatitis E is common in many parts of the world.

What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis E?

Persons with hepatitis E virus infection commonly have abdominal pain, loss of appetite, dark urine, fever, enlarged liver, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), nausea, and vomiting. Less frequently persons with hepatitis E virus infection have joint pains, diarrhea, itchy skin, and hives. Hepatitis E does not lead to a chronic infection.

How is hepatitis E diagnosed?

Talk to your doctor or someone from your local health department if you suspect that you have been exposed to hepatitis E or any type of viral hepatitis. A physician would diagnose hepatitis E virus infection in a patient through a physical exam, assessment of the patient's symptoms and history (especially travel history), and exclusion of other possible causes of hepatitis (like hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C viruses). There is no commercial test available in the United States to diagnose hepatitis E infection.

How is hepatitis E virus transmitted?

Hepatitis E virus is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis E. This type of transmission is called "fecal-oral." For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions. Thus, outbreaks are usually associated with contaminated water supply in countries with poor sanitation.

Is there a vaccine to prevent hepatitis E virus infection?

There is currently no FDA-approved vaccine for hepatitis E.