

## Hepatitis E virus (HEV)

Hepatitis E is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver. People who get hepatitis E virus (HEV) in New Zealand are generally infected overseas. It is more common in India and regions of Asia, Africa and Central America. There are an estimated 20 million cases of HEV worldwide each year.

### Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of HEV include:

- Jaundice (yellow skin or eyes)
- Dark urine
- Pale faeces (poo)
- Loss of appetite
- Tummy pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever

Some people have no symptoms or only a very mild illness. It takes between two and 10 weeks to develop the illness after being exposed to HEV. The illness usually lasts two to six weeks.

It can be a very serious illness for pregnant women. It's recommended they seek medical care as soon as possible if they have hepatitis symptoms.

### How is it spread?

- Drinking contaminated water in countries with poor sanitation
- Eating contaminated food (from infected animals such as pork meat and livers, venison and wild boar)
- Transfusion of infected blood products while overseas
- It can be passed on by pregnant women to their babies
- Eating raw or undercooked shellfish
- Sexual contact, although this is less common

### How to reduce your risk of getting HEV

People travelling to countries where HEV is common should:

- Avoid unsafe drinking water, including ice and drinks mixed with water
- Only drink bottled and boiled water
- Avoid food from street stalls
- Avoid eating uncooked shellfish
- Avoid eating uncooked fruits or vegetables that are prepared by people living in or travelling in countries with high rates of HEV
- Ensure hot food is well cooked, and eaten while it's still hot

It's very important to thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water, and dry them properly. This stops the infection from being passed on to other people.

Visit [www.safetravel.govt.nz](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz) for more information on health advice when traveling abroad.

### What should I do if I think I have HEV?

Contact your doctor and explain what your symptoms are, or call healthline for free on 0800 611 116. If your doctor thinks you have hepatitis they will take a blood sample for testing. Other types of hepatitis are more common so your blood will be tested for these first.

### What happens if you test positive?

To reduce the risk of passing on HEV to others you will need to stay home from work, school or day care. You can return to your normal routine 14 days after you first became unwell.

People you live with or have had close contact with should watch out for symptoms for up to nine weeks after you have recovered. If they develop symptoms they should contact their doctor for medical advice.

### How to reduce the risk of passing on HEV to others

You can pass on HEV to others for up to two weeks after your symptoms start. To protect others you should:

- Wash your hands with soapy water for 20 seconds, then dry well with a clean cloth or paper towel every time:
  - after going to the toilet
  - before preparing food, eating or drinking
  - before and after changing babies nappies or holding a baby
- Avoid preparing food for others where possible
- Avoid sharing food, drinks, spoons and straws
- Wash bed-linen, underwear, towels and handkerchiefs in hot water during your illness
- Anyone who has diarrhoea should not use a pool or swim in a pond while sick
- Be extra careful around pregnant women, babies and small children

HEV can also be passed on from person-to-person through contact with your bodily fluids (e.g. blood, semen). While this is rare, you should take steps to ensure your bodily fluids do not come into contact with others for two weeks after your symptoms started.