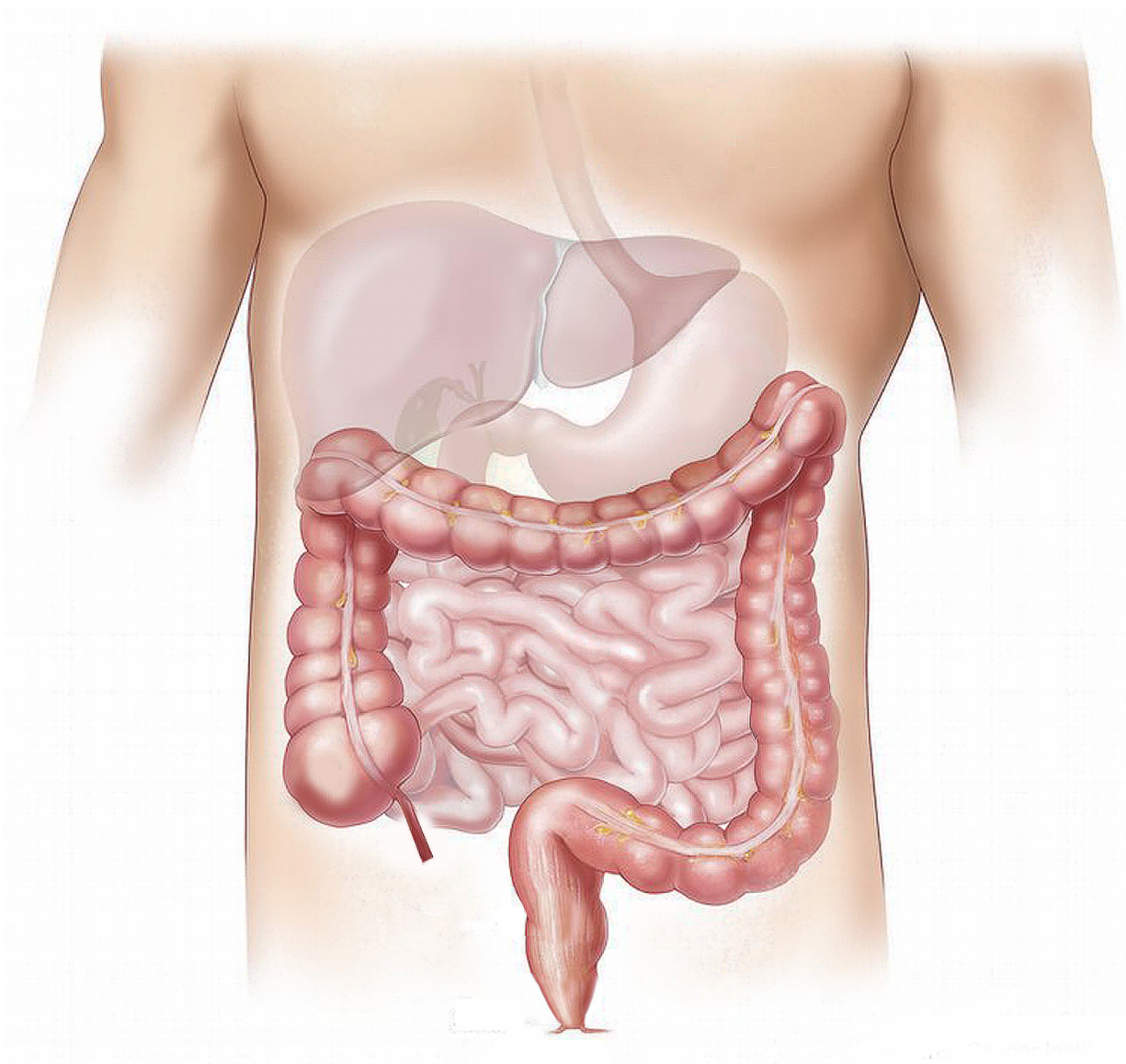


UAH nurses give tips for preventing Hepatitis, Hepatitis A

January 23 2019, by Joyce Anderson-Maples



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Hepatitis A is on the rise in Alabama. In December, the Alabama Department of Public Health sounded the alarm about a Hepatitis A (Hep A) outbreak in Jackson County, the north easternmost county in the state. Hep A is contracted through contaminated foods that have not been washed well prior to consumption or that was handled by someone who does not practice good hand-washing.

"Hepatitis is a [liver disease](#) caused by a virus. It results in inflammation of the [liver](#) and in some cases can result in [liver failure](#)," said Connie Abbott (MSN, CRNP), UAH Faculty and Staff Clinic. Abbott noted that there are three kinds of Hepatitis:

- Hep A: An acute condition that is contracted primarily through fecal-oral route. It is an acute illness and usually resolves on its own without long-term effects. There is a vaccine available to protect against Hep A.
- Hepatitis B: An acute condition that can become chronic and result in liver failure or liver cancer. It is spread through contact with blood and/or body fluids of an infected individual. There is a vaccine available to protect against Hep B.
- Hepatitis C: An acute condition that has a very high possibility of becoming chronic (75-85% of cases) and can also result in liver failure. It is also spread through contact with blood and/or body fluids of an infected individual. No vaccine is available but the condition can be treated.

Abbott said other ways Hep A can develop is by drinking contaminated water, and close contact with an infected person. But, she noted, that you couldn't get the disease through sneezing or coughing. Hep A symptoms may not appear for several weeks after getting the infection and can include:

- Fatigue
- Sudden nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain or discomfort, especially on the upper right side beneath your lower ribs (by your liver)
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Loss of appetite
- Low-grade fever
- Dark urine
- Joint pain
- Yellowing of the skin and the whites of your eyes (jaundice)
- Intense itching

Most Hep A infection symptoms are mild and go away in a few weeks. However, in rare cases, the disease can cause severe illness and last several months. A vaccine for Hep A is available and is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for specific populations.

Abbott said the vaccine is given in two injections, six months apart. The shots are not currently available through the UAH Faculty/Staff clinic www.uah.edu/clinic/services. Abbott said the injections are available at the Alabama Department of Public Health and some physician's offices.

"The best mode of preventing Hep A is good hand-washing," said Abbott. "Wash your hands after using the bathroom, before and after handling food, and after changing a diaper. When washing hands use [warm water](#) and soap, scrubbing hands for at least 20 seconds paying attention to areas between fingers as well. Dry hands with a clean towel and use the towel to turn off the faucet and even to open the door if it's a public restroom." If you fall into one of the at-risk categories, get vaccinated. For more information, please visit: www.cdc.gov/hepatits/hav mayoclinic.org.

Abbott said when traveling; make sure you follow the following

precautions:

- Peel and wash all fresh fruits and vegetables yourself.
- Don't eat raw or undercooked meat and fish.
- Drink bottled water and use it when brushing your teeth.
- Avoid all beverages of unknown purity, with or without ice.
- If bottled water isn't available, boil tap water before drinking it.

Provided by University of Alabama in Huntsville

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