

# HOSPITAL PHYSICIAN®

## GASTROENTEROLOGY BOARD REVIEW MANUAL

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## Hepatitis A, B, and C

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Cover Illustration by Christine Schaar

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#### INTRODUCTION

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The hepatitis A virus (HAV), the hepatitis B virus (HBV), and the hepatitis C virus (HCV) are common causes of viral hepatitis worldwide. When resulting from infection with HAV, viral hepatitis is called hepatitis A. When resulting from infection with HBV, it is called hepatitis B, and it is called hepatitis C when resulting from infection with HCV. Viral hepatitis may be either acute or chronic, although hepatitis A follows only an acute course. The pathologic patterns of acute viral hepatitis are clinically similar regardless of the causative virus. The same is true for chronic viral hepatitis. Jaundice is the most obvious sign of acute viral hepatitis; it may be preceded by influenza-like symptoms, accompanied by nausea and vomiting. Individuals, however, are often asymptomatic or have only mild symptoms. There is no specific treatment for typical acute viral hepatitis. Acute episodes of viral hepatitis usually resolve spontaneously, with full patient recovery often occurring within a few weeks.

Chronic viral hepatitis is defined as evidence of continuing or relapsing liver inflammation for more than 6 months owing to infection with a hepatotropic virus. The symptoms of chronic viral hepatitis are usually nothing more than a general feeling of weakness or loss of stamina and abdominal discomfort, though many individuals remain asymptomatic for years. Chronic viral hepatitis

is usually discovered only upon a routine medical examination. However, it causes substantial morbidity and mortality worldwide. Effective therapies are being developed to treat those with chronic hepatotropic viral infections and to prevent the long-term sequelae of chronic viral hepatitis. The goal of this manual is to use case-based discussions and a question-and-answer format to describe the diagnosis of, and therapeutic options for, patients with acute hepatitis A and acute and chronic hepatitis B and C.

#### HEPATITIS A

HAV is an enterovirus transmitted by the fecal-oral route, and hepatitis A is highly prevalent in developing countries, where hygiene and sanitation are often poor. In such areas, the infection rate approaches 100%,<sup>1,2</sup> and it is common for nearly all of the individuals in these countries to go through the process of exposure, infection, and then immunity while in early childhood. In developed countries, successively older age groups have a higher prevalence for the disease. In the United States, the infection rate reaches about 70% in the 50- to 60-year age range.<sup>1,2</sup> In young children, the disease is often asymptomatic. In adults and older children, the disease tends to be more symptomatic, often presenting with influenza-like symptoms, accompanied by nausea and vomiting. If the patient develops cholestasis, pruritus, jaundice, and choloria will ensue. Hepatitis A does not have a chronic phase, and death from hepatitis A is rare.