Hepatitis Overview

Hepatitis is an irritation or inflammation of the liver. The liver has several vital functions.

- It helps digest food and medicine.
- It helps the body store energy.
- It removes toxins and waste products from the blood.

But with hepatitis, the swollen liver does not work correctly.

What causes hepatitis?

Hepatitis can be caused by:

- A virus – Hepatitis A, B and C are the most common of these viruses
- Toxins or poisons, such as dry cleaning chemicals or a industrial-strength herbicide such as paraquat
- Drinking alcohol
- Autoimmune disease – an attack on the liver by the body’s own immune system
- Herbal supplements, such as cascara, comfrey, kava and ma-huang

Signs of Hepatitis

Often there are no signs of hepatitis. Most often the signs are flu-like and may include:

- A mild fever

Learn more about your health care.
A headache
Muscle aches
Tiredness or weakness
Loss of appetite
Nausea or vomiting
Diarrhea or light colored stool
Dark urine
Jaundice – the white of eyes or skin turn yellow
Abdominal pain

Prevention and Testing
Viral hepatitis can be prevented by good hygiene, healthy lifestyle choices and vaccinations. The testing for and diagnosis of hepatitis may include:

- A physical exam
- An injection to prevent hepatitis
- Blood tests – to determine if and what kind of hepatitis exists, how much of the virus is currently in the blood and to see how the liver is working
- Liver ultrasound or CT scan
- Liver biopsy

You may receive information on a type of hepatitis in addition to this handout. You may also receive more information about treatment.

For more information, you may contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at 1-800-232-4636 or go to their website at www.cdc.gov for more resources.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.