

**DEFINITIONS**

1. **Viral hepatitis** is an acute inflammation of the entire liver due to a virus infection.
2. Hepatitis may occur as an integral part of other diseases, which themselves are viral in origin, such as **Yellow Fever**, **Infectious Mononucleosis** or **Lassa Fever**. The hepatitis in these conditions is not described as viral hepatitis.
3. Four types of viral hepatitis are described depending on the particular virus responsible -
  - 3.1 **Hepatitis A**, also often referred to as **infectious hepatitis, short-incubation hepatitis** or **MS-I hepatitis**.
  - 3.2 **Hepatitis B**, also often referred to as **serum hepatitis, long-incubation hepatitis** or **MS-II hepatitis**.
  - 3.3 **Hepatitis D**.
  - 3.4 **Hepatitis Non-A, Non-B**.

**CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS**

4. The symptoms and signs of acute viral hepatitis are similar for the four types although type B and type non-A, non-B hepatitis tend to be more severe than the others.
5. There is a prodromal period with non-specific, constitutional and mainly gastrointestinal symptoms. These may include malaise, fatigue, anorexia, nausea and vomiting and frequently suggest a "flu" or upper respiratory tract infection.
6. After a period of several days to a week or more, jaundice may appear.
7. There are increasing grades of severity of the illness from an asymptomatic form to a fulminant, fatal form.
8. Hepatitis A does not lead to a **carrier state** whereas the other three can.
9. Hepatitis A does not lead to **Chronic hepatitis** whereas the other three can.

**AETIOLOGY & INCUBATION PERIODS****HEPATITIS A**

10. This hepatitis is caused by infection with an RNA virus.
11. The incubation period between infection and first manifestations is 15-20 days.

12. Transmission is usually by the faecal-oral route and is related to overcrowding, poor hygiene and poor sanitation. Parenteral transmission is extremely rare but can follow transfusion of blood from a donor who is in the incubation stage.

### **HEPATITIS B**

13. This hepatitis is caused by infection with a DNA virus.
14. The incubation period is 50-60 days.
15. Transmission is by parenteral means or by intimate contact such as sexual intercourse, kissing and using shared utensils, toothbrushes and razors.

### **HEPATITIS D**

16. This hepatitis is caused by infection with an RNA virus which does not have a separate existence but which depends upon the hepatitis B virus. It can thus infect individuals simultaneously with hepatitis B or it can super-infect those who are already chronic carriers of hepatitis B.
17. The incubation period is 50-60 days.
18. Transmission is similar to that of hepatitis B.

### **HEPATITIS NON-A, NON-B**

19. The agent for this infection has not been identified and there seem to be two main types, one blood-borne and one enteric. It is possible that there is a third type associated with blood products such as factor VIII.
20. The incubation period is about seven weeks.
21. Transmission varies according to the type, the blood-borne variety being associated with blood transfusion and drug abuse and the enteric variety being associated with poor hygiene, there not being any evidence of sexual transmission.

### **CONCLUSION**

22. Viral hepatitis is an acute inflammatory condition of the liver which may be caused by infection with one or other of several viruses. The incubation periods and methods of spread of these viruses differ but the clinical effects are similar. Some of the viruses may lead to a carrier-state and/or a chronic hepatitis.

### **REFERENCES**

Finlayson N D C, Bouchier I A D and Richmond J. Diseases of the liver and biliary system - Viral Hepatitis. In: (Eds) Edwards Christopher R W and Bouchier Ian A D. Davidson's Principles and Practice of Medicine. 16<sup>th</sup> Ed. 1991. Edinburgh. Churchill Livingstone. p507-511.

Ockner Robert K. Acute Viral hepatitis. In: (Eds) Wyngaarden James B, Smith Lloyd H. Cecil Textbook of Medicine. 18<sup>th</sup> Ed. 1988. Philadelphia. W B Saunders Company. p818-826.

Sherlock Sheila. Diseases of the Liver and Biliary System. 8<sup>th</sup> Ed. 1989. Oxford. Blackwell Scientific Publications. p301-338.