

From the Doctor's Notebook

(Editor's Note: This is the first installment of a new column on health, which will appear twice monthly through 1974. The column is provided through the courtesy of Health & Social Services. Comments and questions received from readers will be submitted to the authors by the Tundra Times.)

HEPATITIS

Yellow may be the color of your true love's hair but if her skin and eyes are yellow too, she probably has hepatitis. The yellow color is due to a buildup of bile in the skin, blood and urine, caused by inflammation of the liver. It's infection of the liver that starts all the trouble and the culprit is a virus.

There are two types of hepatitis virus, each having a different way of spreading but people with "yellow" all look the same. The only way to tell for sure which type of virus is causing the hepatitis is by a blood test.

One type of hepatitis is spread mainly by contaminated food, water, or by close contact with an infected person. This type, often called "Infectious Hepatitis," usually occurs in epidemics and is much more common in children and young adults.

The other virus has been more of a puzzle. It seems to spread mainly through blood transfusions and drug addict needle-sharing but it certainly has other, as yet unknown, ways of getting around. Usually this type does not cause epidemics and seems to infect the older population.

Since this type can be spread through blood and injection needles, blood banks ask prospective donors if they ever had hepatitis. If the answer is, "Yes," the donor's blood may have the virus in it and cannot be used for blood transfusion. This second type of virus is often called

"Serum Hepatitis" because of its spread through blood products.

If you have either type of hepatitis, most likely you will recover without difficulty but a small number of people become severely ill and require hospitalization. Once having had hepatitis, the individual is protected by immunity from having any more than that type of virus.

However, the other type could cause an infection. So, it is possible to have hepatitis twice.

Unfortunately, there is no cure or vaccine for hepatitis yet and there is nothing available to kill the virus once the infection has started.

Sometimes an injection of gamma globulin is given to close contacts of a case of "Infectious Hepatitis." This does not prevent development of the disease but it does reduce the severity of the illness.

At the present time, the only sure way of controlling hepatitis is by eliminating chances for its spread. Good water, food handling and personal hygiene practices, plus proper sewage disposal and careful monitoring of blood donors remain the most effective measures at the present time.

Remember, if you and your true love are occasionally angry red, green with envy, down with the blues or purple with passion, it's probably the "love bug" but if one of you sees "yellow" it's more likely Hepatitis!

If you have questions please write to the Editor of this newspaper. We cannot personally answer inquiries but will select appropriate questions to answer in future columns.