

<b>DATE:</b>	January 26, 2018
<b>TO:</b>	Health Alert Network
<b>FROM:</b>	Rachel Levine, MD, Acting Secretary of Health
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Hepatitis A Among Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM)</b>
<b>DISTRIBUTION:</b>	Southeast
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Southeast
<b>STREET ADDRESS:</b>	Southeast
<b>COUNTY:</b>	Southeast
<b>MUNICIPALITY:</b>	Southeast
<b>ZIP CODE:</b>	Southeast

**This transmission is a “Health Advisory” provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.**

## **SUMMARY**

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) has recently received several reports of hepatitis A among adult men. Investigations to date have found several patients to be men who have sex with men (MSM) and/or persons who are living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), especially among patients in the southeastern part of the state. This suggests transmission may be occurring within this specific population, possibly linked to high-risk sexual behavior.

Multiple person-to-person hepatitis A outbreaks have occurred in other states in the past two years, occurring among at-risk groups such as MSM, persons who inject drugs (PWID), and/or homeless persons. Some outbreaks have occurred among more than one vulnerable population.

DOH advises health care providers to consider vaccinating patients at increased risk for hepatitis A infection. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) identifies both MSM and PWID as risk groups who should receive the hepatitis A vaccine.

Additionally, DOH advises health care providers to consider a diagnosis of hepatitis A in patients in these risks groups who present with symptoms such as fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain, and/or jaundice. Diagnoses require a positive serologic test for immunoglobulin M (IgM) to hepatitis A virus.

Finally, DOH reminds health care providers to promptly notify the health department of potential infection so that appropriate control measures can be instituted.

## **BACKGROUND**

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A usually spreads by ingestion of the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated by small, undetected amounts of fecal matter from an infected person. Hepatitis A is also known to be spread through sex, close personal contact, and sharing needles or other drug paraphernalia.

Persons infected with hepatitis A may be asymptomatic. Those who develop symptoms may exhibit fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain, and/or jaundice. If symptoms do occur, they can begin between 15-50 days after exposure.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Hepatitis A can be prevented through administration of the hepatitis A virus vaccine. ACIP recommends hepatitis A vaccine for the following people:

- All children at age 1 year;
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common;
- Family and caregivers of adoptees from countries where hepatitis A is common;
- Men who have sexual encounters with other men;
- Users of recreational drugs, whether injected or not;
- People with chronic or long-term liver disease, including hepatitis B or hepatitis C;
- People with clotting-factor disorders;
- People with direct contact with others who have hepatitis A; or
- Any person wishing to obtain immunity (protection).

Two doses of hepatitis A vaccine are recommended; however, it is still recommended to administer one dose even if the timing of the second dose cannot be assured.

The hepatitis A vaccine contains inactivated virus, so it can be administered to persons with compromised immune systems.

Persons with known exposures to hepatitis A virus can receive post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), either in the form of immune globulin or hepatitis A vaccine, to prevent against illness. PEP is only effective within the first two weeks after exposure, so it is critical to ascertain exposure and report to the health department as quickly as possible.

Attention to personal hygiene, including hand washing and sanitary disposal of soiled items, is very important to limit spread of hepatitis A. All persons with diarrheal illness should be counseled to wash their hands after using the bathroom, engaging in sexual activity, changing diapers, and before preparing food.

Recent outbreaks should also serve to remind health care providers about the importance of HIV, Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) and Hepatitis testing, as well as counseling for persons in at-risk populations about the factors putting them at increased risk and strategies for prevention.

Any questions or concerns regarding these recommendations should be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH or your local health department. Further information on hepatitis A is available on the DOH website at [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov) or the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Categories of Health Alert messages:

**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of January 26, 2018 but may be modified in the future.
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