

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
2021-PAHAN-591-8-25-UPD
Outbreak of Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) Infections - Update



DATE:	August 25, 2021
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Alison Beam, JD, Acting Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Outbreak of Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) Infections - Update
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	Statewide
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Update” provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Summary

- Since 2017, multiple states including Pennsylvania have experienced large, ongoing hepatitis A outbreaks affecting people who use drugs and/or people who are homeless.
- Hepatitis A cases in Pennsylvania decreased in 2020 but have since begun to increase again. In 2021, Pennsylvania has had 45 hepatitis A cases reported to date.
- DOH recommends that all jurisdictions heighten surveillance for hepatitis A and begin to identify contacts at homeless shelters and other resources necessary for vaccination or other field intervention.
- **DOH is encouraging hepatitis A vaccination for persons experiencing homelessness, persons who report drug use, and men who have sex with men (MSM).**
- Provide hepatitis A vaccination for close or sexual contacts of known cases.
- Please report any suspected clusters of hepatitis A by calling DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department. Additionally, all cases of acute hepatitis A should be reported via PA-NEDSS.

This is a statewide follow-up to Health Advisory #438. Pennsylvania experienced an increase of hepatitis A cases from 2018 to 2019 with over 650 cases reported in 2019. Since then, hepatitis A cases decreased substantially in 2020 but have started to increase again in 2021. Since 2018, 80% of these person-to-person outbreak case-patients have been hospitalized and 15 case-patients have died. Since 2018, 56% of cases report using drugs and/or experiencing homelessness. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health recently released a similar Health Alert describing recent hepatitis A case counts increasing among people who use drugs and/or people who are homeless. (see: https://hip.phila.gov/Portals/default/HIP/HealthAlerts/2021/PDPH-HAN_Alert_5_HepAIncreases_08.06.2021.pdf)

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable, liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV) ranging in severity from mild infection lasting a few weeks to severe disease lasting several months. Hepatitis A usually spreads when a person unknowingly ingests the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated by small, undetected amounts of stool from an infected person. Hepatitis A can also

spread from close personal contact with an infected person such as through sex or caring for someone who is ill. Populations at particular risk during the current outbreaks identified in multiple U.S. states include persons who use injection and non-injection drugs, and/or persons who are homeless, and their close direct contacts, as well as men who have sex with men (MSM).

Given the pattern of significant HAV outbreaks seen in other states and neighboring jurisdictions involving similar populations, there is concern for additional transmission and morbidity across the state. Effective prevention and response measures include early identification of cases, vaccination, enhanced sanitation processes and education of vulnerable populations.

Recommendations for Health Care Providers

1. Consider hepatitis A as a diagnosis in anyone with jaundice or elevated liver enzymes and clinically compatible symptoms of acute hepatitis.
2. Confirm a hepatitis A diagnosis by testing serum for presence of immunoglobulin M (IgM) antibodies to hepatitis A virus and report all cases via PA-NEDSS.
3. Encourage persons who have been exposed recently to HAV and who have not been vaccinated to be administered one dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG) as soon as possible, **within 2 weeks after exposure**. Guidelines vary by age and health status (please see <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/InterimOutbreakGuidance-HAV-VaccineAdmin.htm> for additional information).
4. Consider saving serum samples for additional testing to assist public health officials in the investigation of transmission (i.e., confirmation of antibody test, HAV RNA test, genotyping, and sequencing). Contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health or your local county or municipal health department for assistance with submitting specimens for molecular characterization.
5. Ensure all persons diagnosed with hepatitis A are reported to the PADOH web-based electronic disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS: <https://www.nedss.state.pa.us/nedss/default.aspx>
6. CDC recommends the following groups be vaccinated against hepatitis A:
 - a. All children at age 1 year
 - b. Persons who are at increased risk for infection:
 - i. Persons traveling to or working in countries that have high or intermediate endemicity of hepatitis A;
 - ii. Men who have sex with men;
 - iii. Persons who use injection and non-injection drugs;
 - iv. Persons who have occupational risk for infection;
 - v. Persons who have chronic liver disease;
 - vi. Persons who have clotting-factor disorders;
 - vii. Household members and other close personal contacts or adopted children newly arriving from countries with high or intermediate hepatitis A endemicity; and
 - viii. Persons with direct contact with persons who have hepatitis A.
 - ix. **Patients aged 12 months and older who are currently homeless or who have had periods of homelessness in the past (newly approved Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' (ACIP) recommendation).**
 - c. Persons who are at increased risk for complications from hepatitis A, including people with chronic liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
 - d. Any person wishing to obtain immunity.
7. Please report any suspected clusters of Hepatitis A by calling DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department.

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 August 25, 2021 but may be modified in the future.
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