

**PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
**2018– PAHAN –429 –11-07- ADV**  
**Outbreak of Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) Infections**



<b>DATE:</b>	November 7, 2018
<b>TO:</b>	Health Alert Network
<b>FROM:</b>	Rachel Levine, MD, Secretary of Health
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Outbreak of Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) Infections</b>
<b>DISTRIBUTION:</b>	Statewide
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Statewide
<b>STREET ADDRESS:</b>	n/a
<b>COUNTY:</b>	n/a
<b>MUNICIPALITY:</b>	n/a
<b>ZIP CODE:</b>	n/a

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

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is releasing the following advisory to healthcare providers, “**Outbreak of Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) Infections.**” This is a statewide follow up to Health Advisory #428 issued for the Southwest region. 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.

**Summary**

- The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is alerting healthcare facilities, and programs providing services to affected populations about the outbreaks of hepatitis A infections and provides guidance to assist in identifying and preventing new infections.
- This is a statewide follow up to Health Advisory #428 issued for the Southwest region.
- 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.
- So far in 2018, Pennsylvania has had 81 hepatitis A cases reported to date which is an 80% increase in cases reported from the same time period in the previous 5 years.
- Since 2017, multiple states have been experiencing large, ongoing hepatitis A outbreaks affecting people who use drugs and/or people who are homeless, including neighboring states such as Ohio and West Virginia.
- **Encourage hepatitis A vaccination for the homeless population, persons who report drug use or other risk factors for hepatitis A, such as men who have sex with men (MSM).**
- Provide hepatitis A vaccination for household 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.

Pennsylvania has seen an increase of hepatitis A cases in 2018. To date, 81 hepatitis A cases have been reported statewide, which is an 80% increase compared to the average number of cases reported from the same time period in the previous 5 years. Concurrently, multiple U.S. states have been experiencing large, ongoing hepatitis A outbreaks affecting people who use drugs and/or people who are homeless, including neighboring states such as Ohio and West Virginia.

California, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee, Utah and West Virginia have also reported outbreaks of Hepatitis A virus (HAV) since March 2017.

(see: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00412.asp>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/2017March-HepatitisA.htm>)

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious 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 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
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 public health department for assistance with submitting specimens for molecular characterization.
5. Ensure all persons diagnosed with hepatitis A are reported to PA-NEDSS in a timely manner.
6. Encourage hepatitis A vaccination for the homeless individuals, persons who report drug use or other risk factors for hepatitis A, such as MSM.
7. 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.
  - 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.
8. 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 November 7, 2018, but may be modified in the future.
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