

Health Alert

Rapid Increases in Hepatitis A among People Who Use Drugs in Philadelphia: Expanding Efforts to Provide Hepatitis A Vaccination to At-Risk Persons July 19, 2019

In Philadelphia and other surrounding counties in NJ and PA, rapid increases in Hepatitis A virus (HAV) infections are occurring among persons who use drugs especially among those who are living homeless. Many other states have recently experienced similar HAV outbreaks that have lasted several months and were due to local, person-to-person transmission among at-risk groups. In Philadelphia, the HAV case count to date for 2019 has reached 91, with 73 (80%) cases reported since May. The majority (75%) of HAV cases reported since May are adults who reported drug use (injection or non-injection use of heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, and/or methamphetamine) including 26 (47%) persons who were experiencing homelessness. Local emergency departments/hospitals have diagnosed all but 2 recent cases.

With higher levels of HAV activity expected to continue, providers particularly those who serve patients who use drugs or are experiencing homelessness should:

- **Vaccinate:** Offer HAV vaccine to patients most at-risk for HAV infection or serious complications from HAV due to local transmission including:
 - People who use injection or non-injection drugs
 - People experiencing homelessness or unstable housing
 - People who were recently incarcerated
 - Men who have sex with men (MSM)
 - People with chronic liver disease (cirrhosis, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C)
 - People with HIV (*New Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Recommendation*)

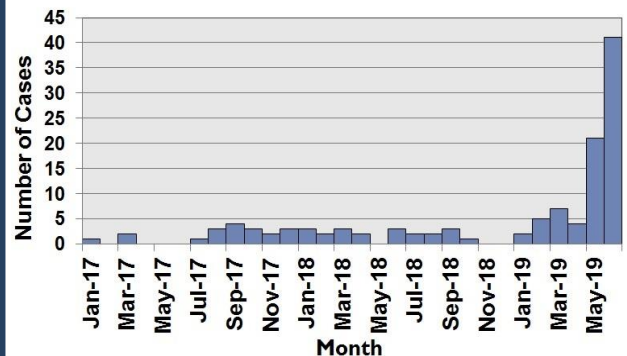
One dose of single-antigen HAV vaccine can be effective for outbreak control and leads to a protective response in 95% of healthy individuals for up to 11 years. Two doses given at least 6 months apart provide life-long immunity.

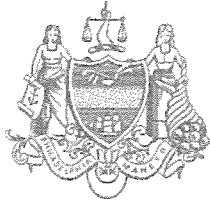
- **Identify and report cases:** Consider HAV for any patient, particularly if at-risk, who has symptoms compatible with acute hepatitis even if presenting to care for other reasons. Promptly report acute HAV cases to PDPH by calling 215-685-6740 (after hours: call 215-686-4514).
- **Recommend HAV control and prevention measures for cases:**
 - Offer HAV vaccine to susceptible, close contacts of cases (e.g., household members, sex partners, persons who shared drugs with the case). Guidance for use of post-exposure vaccine is available [here](#).
 - Advise HAV cases to take other steps to prevent transmission, such as hand washing, avoiding food preparation for others, condom use, and harm reduction practices while contagious (1 week after jaundice onset or if no jaundice, 2 weeks after illness onset).
 - To learn more about the local situation, attend [Hot Topics in Public Health: Resurgence of Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Opioid Epidemic in Philadelphia](#) on July 24, 2019 (see attached letter for details).

SUMMARY POINTS

- A Hepatitis A outbreak is occurring in Philadelphia with most cases reporting drug use.
- Take every opportunity to vaccinate at-risk persons.
- Consider acute HAV infection among patients with compatible symptoms.
- Promptly report acute cases to PDPH.

Increase in Confirmed Acute Hepatitis A Cases, Philadelphia, January 2017 – June 2019





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July 19, 2019

Subject: Invitation to Public Health Seminar on Opioid Epidemic and Infectious Disease Outbreaks in Philadelphia

Dear Healthcare Provider in Philadelphia,

As you know, the City of Philadelphia is experiencing a large and ongoing epidemic of people experiencing homelessness and using drugs. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health Division of Disease Control (DDC) has identified a large outbreak of Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) primarily affecting this population with rapid increases in cases beginning in May of 2019. The Department has also been observing increases in syphilis, HIV, other viral hepatitises (Hepatitis B, C), and invasive group A *Streptococcus* among these populations.

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health is hosting a one-day conference to educate the clinical community about this evolving situation and to review critical response actions when providing health services to these often hard to reach residents of our city. The seminar: **Hot Topics in Public Health, Resurgence of Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Opioid Epidemic in Philadelphia** is Wednesday July 24 from 8:30 to 3:30 at the Science History Institute in Old City Philadelphia (315 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia PA 19106). Free continuing education credits will be available to physicians, nurses, physician assistants, and those certified in public health (CPH). Registration has been extended. To register please go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SLSTKZJ>.

The Department needs your help to control these infectious diseases affecting our city. I hope that you are able to attend this seminar.

Sincerely,

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