

April 30, 2019

Widespread Outbreaks of Hepatitis A among People Who Use Drugs and People Experiencing Homelessness—ACIP Recommends Hepatitis A Vaccination

Actions Requested

- Offer HAV vaccination to people who use drugs (injection and non-injection), people experiencing homelessness, men who have sex with men (MSM), people who are or were recently incarcerated, people with chronic liver disease—emergency departments and organizations serving affected populations can be important sources of preventive care for these at-risk individuals
- Consider hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection as a diagnosis in anyone with jaundice or clinically compatible symptoms.
- Record immunizations in the state immunization information system (The Washington State Immunization System, WIIS)
- Administer HAV postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) if indicated. PEP regimens vary by age and health status, see link below.
- Rapidly report hepatitis A cases to Kitsap Public Health District (KPHD) by calling (360) 728-2235 to ensure timely case investigation and follow-up of contacts.

For questions, please contact our Communicable Disease staff at (360) 728-2235.

Background

Currently, the Kitsap Public Health District has received no reports of hepatitis A infection in Kitsap County. Since November 2018, King County has received 8 reports of potentially locally-acquired cases of confirmed HAV infection. Five cases are in MSM, one case reported non-injection drug use, and the most recent case in April 2019 was in an individual experiencing homelessness, who was hospitalized.

As of February 15, 2019, ACIP recommends hepatitis A vaccination for people experiencing homelessness. Previously included in their recommendations were people who use drugs, MSM and people with chronic liver disease. ACIP recommends hepatitis A vaccine for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for people 12 months of age and older. Providers may also administer immunoglobulin to adults older than 40 years of age, if indicated, and persons who are immunocompromised or have chronic liver disease.

HAV is highly transmissible from person-to-person. States experiencing large-scale outbreaks have reported widespread transmission soon after their jurisdictions first recognized hepatitis A cases among people using drugs and among people experiencing homelessness. For many states, this has resulted in an unprecedented number of hepatitis A cases among unvaccinated adults, a high proportion of severe infections including hospitalizations and deaths, and has led to prolonged community outbreaks that have been challenging and costly to control.

The best way to prevent HAV infection is through vaccination with the hepatitis A vaccine. One dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine has been shown to control outbreaks of hepatitis A and provides up to 95% seroprotection in healthy individuals for up to 11 years. Pre-vaccination serologic testing is not required to administer hepatitis A vaccine. Vaccinations should not be postponed if vaccination history cannot be obtained or records are unavailable.

Resources

- CDC, Update: Widespread Outbreaks of Hepatitis A among People Who Use Drugs and People Experiencing Homelessness across the United States: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00418.asp>
- Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for Use of Hepatitis A Vaccine for Persons Experiencing Homelessness: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6806a6.htm>
- CDC, Hepatitis A Outbreak: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/2017March-HepatitisA.htm>
- Public Health - Seattle and King County, Hepatitis A information: <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/hepatitis-A.aspx>
- Washington State Department of Health, Hepatitis A information: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/ForPublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/NotifiableConditions/HepatitisA>
- CDC, Update: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for use of hepatitis A vaccine for post exposure prophylaxis and for preexposure prophylaxis for international travel : https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6743a5.htm?s_cid=mm6743a5_w
- ACIP Recommendations June 2018 HAN00412 <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00412.asp>