

August 1, 2019

Hepatitis A Outbreak in Washington State, Vaccination of At-Risk Individuals Requested

Actions Requested

- **Be vigilant** for potential Hepatitis A infections, especially among persons who are at increased risk.
 - **Persons at increased risk** include persons experiencing homelessness, persons who use illicit drugs (injection and non-injection) and alcohol, and men who have sex with men.
- **Offer Hepatitis A immunization** during clinical encounters to persons at increased risk if there is no documentation of previous vaccination or laboratory immunity to Hepatitis A.
 - Do not delay immunization to assess immune status if not previously documented.
- **Notify public health** of Hepatitis A infections within 24 hours of case identification. This will help facilitate public health investigation.
- **Contact our Communicable Disease staff if you have questions** at 360-728-2235.

Background

Kitsap County has no Hepatitis A cases associated with the statewide Hepatitis A outbreak at this time. The Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH) has announced a Hepatitis A (HAV) outbreak within Washington State. Multiple states across the country have reported outbreaks of HAV, primarily among persons experiencing homelessness and persons who use illicit drugs and alcohol. Since the outbreaks were first identified nationally in 2017, 25 states have publicly reported over 22,500 cases and 13,000 hospitalizations. Rates of hospitalization are higher than typical for HAV infections, and severe complications have been reported, including liver transplantation or death; at least 221 deaths have occurred nationwide.

HAV can spread easily in places where people experiencing homelessness gather, and crowded settings where handwashing facilities are limited and sanitation is poor. Healthcare providers should be vigilant for potential HAV infections among persons who are at increased risk, including persons experiencing homelessness, persons who use illicit drugs (injection and non-injection) and alcohol, and men who have sex with men (MSM). Persons with chronic liver disease are at increased risk for fulminant hepatitis A should they become infected and susceptible people with chronic liver disease should be vaccinated.

The best way to prevent HAV infection is through vaccination with the Hepatitis A vaccine. In February 2019, CDC recommended all persons aged greater than age one year experiencing homelessness be immunized against HAV. Concern about loss to follow-up before HAV vaccine series completion should not be a deterrent to initiating the vaccine series in persons experiencing homelessness. One dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine has been shown to control outbreaks of HAV and provides up to 95% seroprotection in healthy individuals for up to 11 years. Primary care providers, acute care facilities, and Emergency Departments can help to prevent an HAV outbreak in Kitsap county by offering HAV vaccine during all clinical encounters to susceptible persons at increased risk.

Resources

WA DOH 2019 Hepatitis A Outbreak web page:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/Immunization/DiseasesandVaccines/HepatitisADisease/HepatitisA2019>

CDC ACIP Vaccine Recommendations and Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/hepa.html>

CDC "Pink Book" Excerpt on HAV: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/hepa.pdf>

CDC Health Update: Widespread Outbreaks of Hepatitis A among People Who Use Drugs and People Experiencing Homelessness across United States, March 25, 2019: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00418.asp>