

MEDIA RELEASE

DATE: December 12, 2017 **END DATE:** January 12, 2018

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RE: Hepatitis A Outbreak Update: GCHD Encouraging Vaccination and Handwashing

The Genesee County Health Department (GCHD) has joined a growing list of counties that are part of the ongoing Hepatitis A outbreak in Southeast Michigan that started August 1, 2016. Statewide there have been over 583 cases associated with the outbreak, including 20 deaths. In 2017, eight (8) confirmed cases of Hepatitis A have been reported in Genesee County. Seven (7) of the cases have occurred since October 1, 2017. To date, seven (7) cases from Genesee County have been linked to the outbreak. As there are indications that the outbreak could spread, GCHD wants to remind residents that the most effective way to prevent Hepatitis A infection is through vaccination and proper hygiene, including thorough handwashing.

GCHD recommends that the following individuals, who are known to be at high risk for Hepatitis A, get vaccinated:

- People who use injection or non-injection illegal drugs.
- People who are homeless.
- People incarcerated in correctional facilities.
- People who work with the high-risk populations listed above, including first responders and health care providers.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People who prepare food for others, such as food service employees and restaurant workers.
- People who have close contact, care for, or live with someone who has hepatitis A.
- People with chronic liver disease, such as cirrhosis, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C.
- People with clotting factor disorders

Hepatitis A, a vaccine-preventable disease, is an infection of the liver caused by the Hepatitis A virus (HAV) and is most commonly spread from person to person through the fecal-oral route (i.e. ingestion of something that has been contaminated with the feces of an infected person). One can

get HAV by eating contaminated food or drinking water, during sex, or just by living with an infected person. Symptoms of HAV infection include sudden abdominal pain, dark urine, nausea, fatigue, diarrhea, headache, fever, loss of appetite, and vomiting followed by yellowing of the eyes or skin. Symptoms typically appear about one month after exposure, but may appear within two to six weeks of being exposed. The risk of infection is highest for individuals who live with, have sexual contact with, or share injection or non-injection illegal drugs with someone who has Hepatitis A.

How to prevent hepatitis A infection:

- Vaccination with the Hepatitis A vaccine is the best way to prevent HAV infection and is safe for all individuals including those with liver disease or weakened immune systems. One dose is at least 95 percent effective at preventing infection if given before or within two weeks after exposure to the virus. Hepatitis A vaccine is available at local pharmacies, through some healthcare providers, or at local health departments.
- Good hand hygiene is integral to prevention. Wash your hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating meals.
- Use your own towels, toothbrushes, and eating utensils and do not share food, drinks, drugs, or smokes with other people.
- Do not have sex with someone who has HAV infection.

Please speak to your healthcare provider about your risks for HAV infection. Seek medical attention if you develop signs or symptoms of Hepatitis A. **Suspected and confirmed cases of Hepatitis A should be reported to GCHD at (810) 257-1017.** For any questions or concerns in general about Hepatitis A, call our Hepatitis A hotline at (810) 257-3048.

GCHD wants you and your family to stay up-to-date on the most recent information and surveillance regarding Hepatitis A. For more information about Hepatitis A please visit our website at www.gchd.us. Additional information and current recommendations can also be found at <http://www.michigan.gov/hepatitisaoutbreak> and <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/afaq.htm>.

Genesee County Health Department. Your Health. Our Work.

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