

Health Alert

Hepatitis A in Philadelphia: Updates on Recent Increases and the National Frozen Strawberry Recall June 26, 2023

Since January 2023, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) has identified 52 locally-acquired Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) cases including 1 fatal infection. Median age of the cases was 41 years (range: 26–74 years), and 71% were male. Among the HAV cases occurring since January, 30 cases (58%) reported current injection and/or non-injection drug use including 17 cases (33%) who were also experiencing homelessness or unstable housing. Although cases due to person-to-person transmission among at-risk persons are still occurring, activity has declined since May 2023 (Figure).

Among recent HAV cases, PDPH is also investigating possible exposures to products identified in the [national frozen organic strawberry recall](#). Along with recognition of HAV infection among at-risk persons, providers should consider HAV in patients who have compatible symptoms and consumed frozen strawberries during the possible exposure period (15–50 days before symptom onset). In addition, providers should offer post-exposure HAV vaccination to any susceptible patient aged ≥12 months who has consumed the recalled frozen strawberry products within the past 2 weeks.

HAV Prevention and Control:

HAV vaccination is **the most important strategy** to prevent further increases in HAV. Providers should use all opportunities to routinely give the 2-dose HAV vaccine series to all children at age 12-23 months **as well as the following persons at-risk for exposure or severe disease:**

- Persons who use injection or non-injection drugs
- Persons experiencing homelessness or unstable housing
- Persons who are or were recently incarcerated
- Men who have sex with men
- Persons with chronic liver disease
- Persons with HIV

Additionally, others, regardless of risk factors, who wish to obtain immunity should be vaccinated.

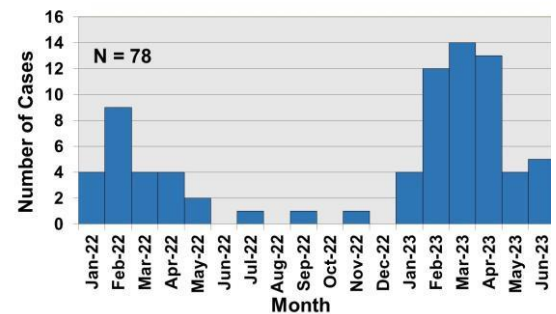
Vaccines for Children (VFC) and Vaccines for Adults at Risk (VFAAR) providers should continue to order HAV vaccine through the PhilaVax inventory module. If your facility does not have HAV vaccine, please encourage patients to visit a pharmacy if they have insurance. Patients should call ahead to make sure that the pharmacy has HAV vaccine. Patients who are uninsured or are having difficulty accessing vaccine can visit a [Philadelphia Department of Public Health \(PDPH\) HAV vaccine clinic](#). If you have questions about accessing vaccine for adults, contact vaccines@phila.gov.

Case ascertainment: Prompt recognition of HAV is also important to control transmission and allow time-sensitive administration of post-exposure prophylaxis to exposed contacts. ALL confirmed and suspected Hepatitis A cases should be promptly reported to PDPH at 215-685-6740 during regular business hours or 215-686-4514 after-hours.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Consider HAV infection among patients presenting with compatible symptoms, particularly individuals who are at-risk for person-to-person exposure or report consuming frozen strawberries.
- Take every opportunity to vaccinate at-risk persons.
- Promptly report acute cases to PDPH.

Locally-Acquired Hepatitis A Cases, Philadelphia, January 2022 – June 2023*



*Month to date case counts presented for June 2023.