

Health Alert

Public Health Emergency: Hepatitis A Outbreak among At-Risk People in Philadelphia August 8, 2019

On August 1st, Philadelphia declared a public health emergency in response to continuing rapid increases in hepatitis A virus (HAV) infections among persons who use drugs and those who are living homeless. Many states are experiencing similar HAV outbreaks lasting several months due to local, person-to-person transmission among at-risk groups. In Philadelphia, the HAV case count has reached 176, the majority (67%) of whom are adults who reported injection or non-injection drug use. Forty-four (25%) persons were also experiencing homelessness.

Among a sample of cases, HAV type 1B, which has been associated with greater virulence, was detected. To date, one fatality has occurred in a person with underlying chronic conditions and fulminant infection.

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.

Hepatitis A vaccination is the most important tool to prevent disease and stop this outbreak. Efforts are needed from everyone in the healthcare community to effectively control this outbreak. Many adults in Philadelphia, especially those who use drugs or are experiencing homelessness, may not have a consistent medical provider. **Therefore, it is important to offer vaccine to anyone at high risk for HAV infection or serious complication at every opportunity and in any care location.**

- **Vaccinate:** Offer HAV vaccine to patients most at-risk for HAV infection or serious complications from HAV including:
 - People who use injection or non-injection drugs
 - People experiencing homelessness or unstable housing
 - People who are or 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 is 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:** 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).

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

