



Disease Control and Epidemiology

Update: Hepatitis A Outbreaks in Homeless and Illicit Drug Using Populations in California

September 21, 2017

Outbreaks of Hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection have been identified in homeless and illicit drug user populations in San Diego, Santa Cruz, and Los Angeles Counties. San Diego County has identified 444 cases of HAV infection, including 16 deaths, since early in 2017; Santa Cruz County has had 69 cases since April. Earlier this week, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health reported an outbreak of HAV infections in their homeless population. Two Los Angeles cases apparently acquired disease in that county; eight more have occurred there after exposure in San Diego or Santa Cruz.

Orange County has had one case of HAV infection in a homeless resident. This person developed HAV in July after travel to San Diego during the potential exposure period. Additional cases in Orange County associated with these outbreaks may occur.

For more information on the San Diego outbreak:

http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/dc/Hepatitis_A.html.

For more information on the Santa Cruz outbreak: <http://santacruzhealth.org/HSAHome/HealthAlerts.aspx>.

Recommendations:

- **In response to these outbreaks, the Orange County Health Care Agency (OCHCA) and the California Department of Public Health recommend that California providers offer HAV vaccine to persons who are homeless or might be using illicit injection or noninjection drugs.**
- Any homeless person who is one year of age or older should receive two doses of HAV vaccine separated by 6 to 18 months. The first dose should protect most healthy persons. OCHCA is conducting outreach to offer HAV vaccination to these populations throughout the County.
- HAV vaccination may be considered for persons with ongoing, close contact with homeless and illicit drug using individuals in Orange County. These persons, which could include workers in homeless shelters, jails, food pantries, drug rehabilitation programs, etc., are at low risk of HAV exposure at present, given that no local spread has been identified. However, additional cases or outbreaks of HAV could occur in the future in populations they serve.
- HAV vaccination is routinely recommended for all children at one year of age, as well as persons with high risk conditions or behaviors including:
 - Persons with chronic liver disease, including those with hepatitis B or C virus (HBV or HCV) infection
 - Users of injection and noninjection illicit drugs
 - Men who have sex with men
 - Persons traveling to or working in countries that have high or intermediate levels of HAV transmission

- Any person wishing to obtain immunity to HAV
- Persons who have been exposed to HAV in the prior 2 weeks and are not known to be immune (immune globulin is an alternative to vaccine or given in addition to vaccine in some instances).
- The first dose of single-antigen HAV vaccine appears to provide protection to more people than the first dose of the combined HAV/HBV (Twinrix®) vaccine. This apparent advantage disappears when the respective series are completed. The California Department of Public Health recommends that providers consider the short-term risks of exposure to HAV, the likelihood of follow-up to complete multidose immunization and the need for protection from HBV when selecting vaccines for those at risk. Immunization against HAV with existing supplies should not be delayed to obtain a different formulation of vaccine.
- **Providers should report any suspect or confirmed HAV-infected patients promptly to Orange County Public Health Epidemiology by phone at 714-834-8180 or by fax at 714-564-4050.**
- Consider HAV infection in persons with signs and/or symptoms of hepatitis, particularly in those who report a history of homelessness and/or IVDU. HAV infection signs and symptoms include jaundice, dark urine, fever, malaise, anorexia, nausea, diarrhea, and abdominal discomfort, and increased transaminases (AST/ALT). The incubation period for HAV infection ranges from 15–50 days.
- Send serum for HAV IgM testing in all suspect hepatitis A patients.

Contact Information:

For questions or concerns please contact the **Epidemiology and Assessment Program at 714-834-8180.**