



### 1. How is hepatitis A currently being spread in this outbreak?

Hepatitis A can be spread when small amounts of stool from an infected person enter the mouth of an uninfected person. Hepatitis A is spread when:

- An infected person does not wash his/her hands properly after going to the bathroom and then touches other objects or food
- A susceptible person touches an object, eats food, or drinks a beverage contaminated by stool from an infected person
- A susceptible person engages in sexual activities with an infected person

In this outbreak, hepatitis A is spreading most among people experiencing homelessness and people who use illicit drugs, in areas where toilets and places to wash hands are limited.

### 2. What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A can be a mild illness in some people, but it can also be serious and sometimes fatal. Most people recover, and many never show symptoms.

If symptoms occur, they may include the following:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored stool
- Joint pain
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes

### 3. Who should get vaccinated right now?

Vaccination is the most effective way to protect against hepatitis A. However, not everyone is at immediate risk of getting the disease during the outbreak.

People experiencing homelessness and people using illicit drugs (except marijuana) are at the highest risk of becoming infected right now and so are the highest priority for getting vaccinated.

In areas where hepatitis A is currently spreading, people with lots of contact with either people experiencing homelessness or people using illicit drugs might also need to be vaccinated. If you are one of these people, contact your healthcare provider or local health department to find out more.

Although men who have sex with men are routinely recommended to receive hepatitis A vaccine, it is even more important right now for these men to receive the vaccine because the number of hepatitis A cases among men who have sex with men in 2017 is much higher this year than in 2016.

If you've had lots of close contact with a person who has been **diagnosed with hepatitis A**, you also need to see your healthcare provider right away to avoid getting hepatitis A yourself.

If you are in one of the groups below, you are [routinely recommended](#) to receive the hepatitis A vaccine and you should talk to your doctor about being vaccinated:

- a. All children at one year of age
- b. People with chronic liver disease, including hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- c. People who have clotting-factor disorders

- d. Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common
- e. Family and caregivers of adoptees from countries where hepatitis A is common
- f. People who may have been exposed from close contact with someone infected with hepatitis A (as mentioned above)
- g. People using illicit drugs (as mentioned above)
- h. Men who have sex with men (as mentioned above)

#### **4. Am I at risk of getting hepatitis A in this outbreak?**

Most people are not at risk. Your level of risk for getting hepatitis A depends on whether you are in one of the risk groups and also where you live or work.

The general population or anyone outside of the risk groups (described in FAQ #3) have a very low risk for getting hepatitis A and are not recommended to get the vaccine at this time. The spread of hepatitis A from this outbreak is happening only in some counties. Check the [CDPH hepatitis A outbreak website](#) to see if an outbreak has been declared in your county.

People who are at low risk, who want to be vaccinated, may need to wait until more vaccines become available again.

Regardless of whether you are vaccinated, washing your hands with soap and water after using the restroom and before eating can help reduce the transmission hepatitis A and other infections.

#### **5. Who has already been vaccinated?**

Since 1999, the hepatitis A vaccine has been recommended for all California children as part of their routine vaccinations. People who were vaccinated as children are protected from becoming infected and do not need to be

vaccinated again. People who served in the active duty US military since 1998 have also been vaccinated.

Other children and adults may have received hepatitis A vaccine in the 20 years that the vaccine has been available.

#### **6. How do I learn if I've been vaccinated?**

If you don't have your vaccination records, contact your health care provider or check with the California Immunization Registry (CAIR) by emailing [CAIRHelpDesk@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:CAIRHelpDesk@cdph.ca.gov) or call 800-578-7889. However, many adults in California have not been vaccinated unless they have served in the military since 1998 or have gotten the hepatitis A vaccine before travel to an area where hepatitis A infection is common.

#### **7. Why is the supply of vaccine low and when will it get better?**

With many outbreaks of hepatitis A happening in adults across the US and internationally, lots of hepatitis A vaccine has been needed in the past 6 months and the number of vaccines available can't keep up with the need. In order to make sure the vaccine gets to the people who need it the most right now, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is working closely with local public health departments to figure out the best ways to reach those people.

Also, the companies that make the adult hepatitis A vaccine are working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to watch and manage vaccine orders to make the best use of hepatitis A vaccine supplies while the numbers of vaccines can't keep up with the need. At the moment, there is plenty of hepatitis A vaccine for children, which is a different vaccine.

**8. If I just want to get vaccinated, and I'm not in a high risk group, can I get it anyway?**

Talk to your doctor if you would like to be vaccinated. Your doctor can talk with you about your interest in getting protection against hepatitis A and the availability of vaccine in local pharmacies or other locations.

**9. What else can I do protect myself from hepatitis A?**

While hepatitis A cases occur every year in California, you can help prevent the spread of hepatitis A by washing your hands often, especially after you go to the bathroom and before eating or preparing food, and by avoiding having sex with an infected person. Alcohol hand rubs do not work against hepatitis A.

**10. How many cases of hepatitis A are usually reported in California?**

In 2014, 2015, and 2016, there were 146, 181, and 231 cases, respectively, of hepatitis A disease reported in California.

**11. How serious is this Hepatitis A outbreak?**

This is a very serious outbreak which has caused a lot of people to go to the hospital and some people have died. It is the largest hepatitis A outbreak in the United States that is not caused by a contaminated food since hepatitis A vaccine became available in 1996. CDPH is helping local public health departments control this outbreak by giving vaccines to people at risk of being infected and increasing access to toilets and hand washing for people experiencing homelessness.

**12. Why is this outbreak so large?**

Hepatitis A virus is easily spread when there isn't good hygiene. Clean toilets and hand washing places are often not available for people experiencing homelessness and may be less available to some people using illicit drugs.

Vaccinating high-risk people is very tough, partly because vaccinations need to be given in tough places to reach, like shelters and camps on the streets or in other public areas.

It is harder to reach people in these risk groups, because of they might not trust public health authorities, have mental illness, or because of other factors.

It is also tough to find people in close contact with an infected person to offer vaccine, which can prevent disease if it is given soon after the contact happens.

**13. Why are there so many deaths and hospitalizations? Is this a more deadly hepatitis A strain?**

The deaths and hospitalizations are thought to be from the poor health of some people who have become infected with hepatitis A. Many of them have chronic liver disease and other conditions that can make them seriously ill.

The hepatitis A strain in this outbreak doesn't appear to be more deadly.

**14. What are the prevention and control tools for a hepatitis A outbreak?**

The main tool to control a hepatitis A outbreak is hepatitis A vaccine. Vaccine is given to people in the risk group who haven't been exposed yet, as well as people who have been exposed to an infected person.

When a hepatitis A case is reported, a local health department will try to find all people

with close contact with the case while they were infectious. The local health department will offer these close contacts medication (vaccine or immunoglobulin) to prevent disease.

Hepatitis A vaccine is very good at preventing disease; more than 95% of adults are protected after one of the two injections (nearly 100% of adults are protected after two injections).

Hepatitis A vaccination has been recommended for all children in California since 1999, so most adults in California have not gotten the hepatitis A vaccine.

Careful handwashing can stop hepatitis A from being transmitted. In this outbreak, improving access to toilets and places to wash hands is also important.

## 15. Are there other current hepatitis A outbreaks in the U.S.?

A hepatitis A outbreak is also happening in Michigan that is mainly affecting people with the same risks as in California, meaning people who are experiencing homelessness or using drugs. See [www.michigan.gov/hepatitisAoutbreak](http://www.michigan.gov/hepatitisAoutbreak) for more information.

In 2017, there have also been lots of hepatitis A infections among men who have sex with men in Colorado, New York City, and other cities around the world.

These outbreaks are not currently linked to the California outbreak among people experiencing homelessness or using illicit drugs.

## 16. What is CDPH doing to help stop the current outbreak?

CDPH is carrying out the Governor's 10/13/17 declaration of a state of emergency for California for the hepatitis A outbreak, by buying more vaccines and managing the

distribution of vaccine so people most at risk are the first to get vaccinated. In addition, CDPH has:

- Given out statewide guidance to improve the use of hepatitis A vaccine for outbreak control
- Provided staff to local health departments to help manage the outbreak
- Held regular calls with local health departments and CDC to share successes and support disease control efforts
- Closely monitored cases of hepatitis A to guide the statewide response and quickly detect disease spread
- Provided more than 80,000 doses of federally funded hepatitis A vaccine for outbreak control
- Helped make laboratory testing available to figure out whether new cases are part of the outbreak

CDPH has put together and handed out disease control information to local health departments including:

- Guidance for healthcare providers on how to prevent, recognize, and treat hepatitis A
- Guidance on how to investigate cases and find close contacts of cases
- Guidance on how to treat people after being exposed to an infected person
- Tools to interview patients
- Guidance on hygiene and keeping things clean

CDPH continues to watch the situation and figure out ways to help control this outbreak, prevent new outbreaks from starting, and make sure as many infections can be prevented as possible.

## 17. When will the outbreak be over?

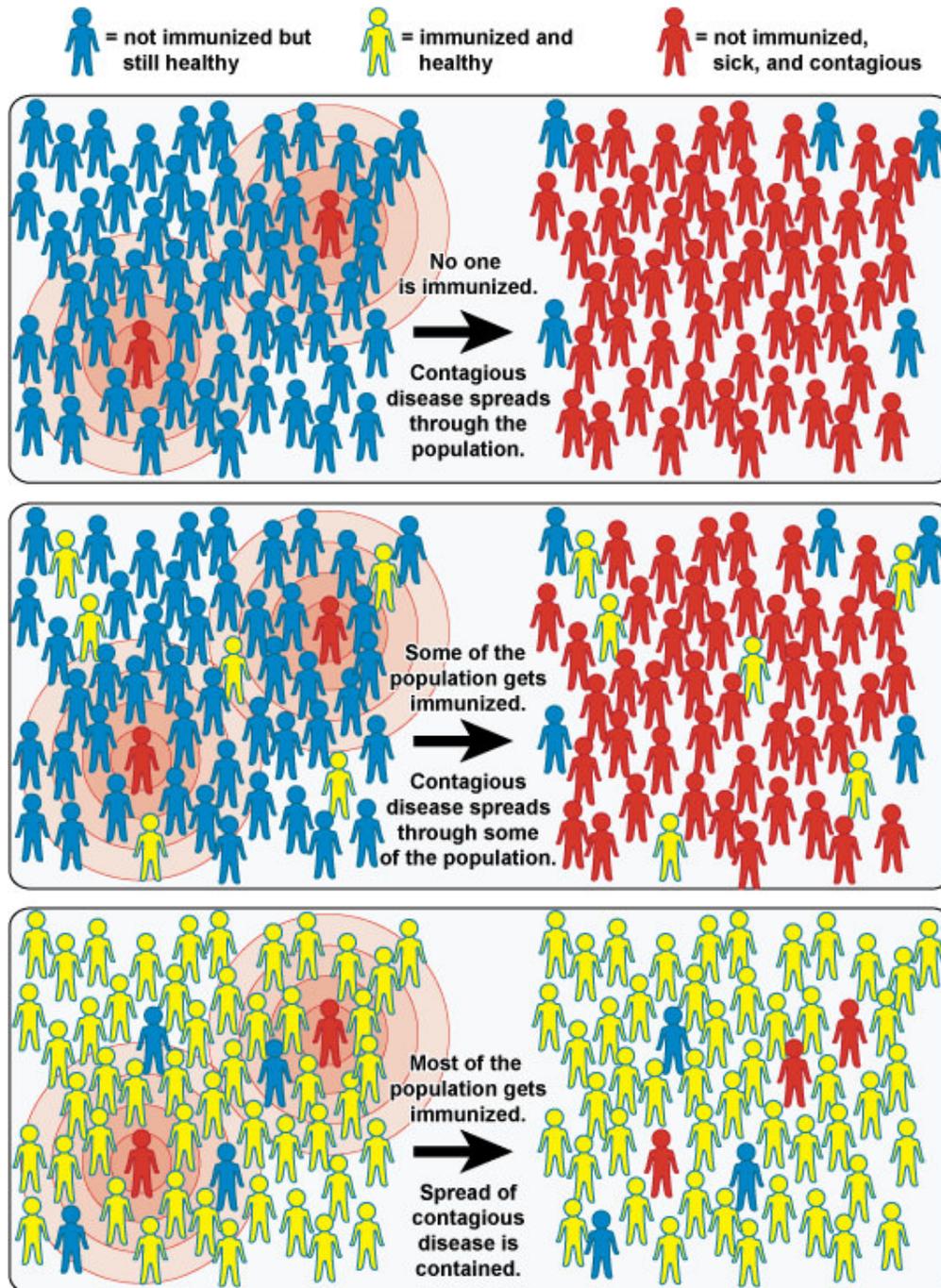
People can become immune to hepatitis A from either being vaccinated, or having been infected in the past.

It is difficult to tell when the outbreak will end or how many people will become sick. It depends on how many people at high risk for infection are not immune in areas where hepatitis A is spreading.

Once enough people become immune, whether through vaccination or from having been infected in the past, the spread of hepatitis A will stop. This stopping point is also called reaching “herd immunity”.

Efforts to improve hygiene are also key to stopping the spread of hepatitis A.

The diagrams below from the National Institutes of Health describe “herd immunity”:



**18. I work or regularly volunteer with people experiencing homelessness or using illicit drugs. Should I get vaccinated?**

If you are in a county where there is a lot of hepatitis A spreading, then you should get vaccinated. Contact your occupational health representative or healthcare provider to learn whether you should get vaccinated. Most people who work with people experiencing homelessness or using illicit drugs have a low risk of getting hepatitis A, especially if you thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water before eating and after using the bathroom.

**19. I'm not a regular volunteer, but plan to volunteer to serve people experiencing homelessness during the holidays. What precautions should I take, if any?**

Most volunteers serving people experiencing homelessness during the holidays are not at increased risk for getting hepatitis A. Talk to your doctor to learn whether you should get vaccinated. There are steps you can take anytime to protect yourself, including thoroughly washing your hands with soap and water before you eat and after using the bathroom. Thanks for taking the time to help those in need.

**20. How do I know if my county has been affected? Where can I get more information?**

CDPH makes updates weekly on the [hepatitis A outbreak website](#). People can also contact their [local health department](#).

**21. Where can I get more information about protecting myself from hepatitis A?**

The best way to find information about protecting yourself is by talking with your doctor. You can also learn more about hepatitis A on the following websites:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) hepatitis A webpage](#)
- [California Department of Public Health \(CDC\) hepatitis A webpage](#)
- [California Department of Public Health \(CDC\) hepatitis A outbreak webpage](#)
- [Your local health department website](#)