TO: Substance Use Treatment, Behavioral Health, and Mental Health Facilities; Homeless and Housing Assistance Providers; Board and Care Facilities; and Food Pantry Providers

Subject: PREVENTING HEPATITIS A IN YOUR FACILITIES – Updated October 25, 2017

(This communication supersedes the version sent early October 2017.)

A large outbreak of hepatitis A infections is ongoing in multiple areas of California. Most people who have become ill in the outbreaks have reported experiencing homelessness and/or using illicit drugs (injection or non-injection).

Hepatitis A virus is spread through fecally contaminated food or drink, sexual contact, or touching contaminated objects and then touching the mouth. Hepatitis A virus is shed in feces and people infected with hepatitis A who do not thoroughly wash their hands after defecating can spread the infection to others. Hepatitis A infection is typically a self-limited illness, but severe and even fatal illness can occur in people with underlying health conditions, particularly those with chronic liver diseases such as alcoholic cirrhosis, and hepatitis B and hepatitis C infection. Hepatitis A vaccine and thorough hand hygiene can prevent the disease.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) strongly recommends your facility follow the steps below to help prevent the spread of hepatitis A:

- **Assess clients for potential signs of hepatitis A infection during and after intake.**
  - Screen clients for fever, fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite, yellowing of skin or eyes, stomach pain, vomiting, dark urine, pale stools, and diarrhea. Consider adapting San Diego County’s [fact sheet](#) to educate patients and staff.
  - Refer people with signs of hepatitis A for medical evaluation and report these suspected cases to your local health department right away.

- **Remind staff and clients of the importance of handwashing** with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, and before preparing, serving, or eating food. Waterless hand sanitizers are not effective against hepatitis A virus. Post this multilingual [Wash Your Hands poster](#) in bathrooms and kitchens. FREE copies of the poster can be ordered from your local health department.

- **Ensure routine and consistent cleaning of bathrooms** for staff and clients, using chlorine bleach with a ratio of 1 and 2/3 cup of bleach to one gallon of water. Due to the high bleach concentration of this mix, rinse surfaces with water after 1 minute of contact time and wear gloves while cleaning. Visit San Diego County’s [Hepatitis A webpage](#) for additional information.

- **Contact your local health department** to learn whether your clients should be prioritized for hepatitis A vaccination.

- If your local health department determines that you have clients that should be prioritized for hepatitis A vaccination, vaccinate onsite if possible. If your facility is unable to vaccinate onsite,
make a strong referral for vaccination offsite.

- For Medi-Cal patients (Fee for Service or Managed Care), hepatitis A vaccine given in a provider’s office or network pharmacy is covered without prior authorization. Call the Plan’s member services number (on the back of the patient’s Medi-Cal ID card) to locate a network pharmacy and confirm availability of the vaccine in the pharmacy.
- Medi-Cal provides coverage for transportation for medical care, including vaccination. For information, contact the client’s Medi-Cal member services department or call 1-800-541-5555.
- Vaccine Finder (https://vaccinefinder.org/) can be used to help clients find a location nearby that stocks hepatitis A vaccine and accepts the client’s insurance.
- Consult with your local health department to determine whether hepatitis A vaccine should also be offered to staff (including intake workers, food handlers, and custodians) or other clients.

Everyone can play a role in addressing this significant public health threat. Thank you for your help in preventing the spread of hepatitis A. For more information about preventing the spread of hepatitis A for your staff and clients, contact your local health department or visit the CDC website.

Immunization Branch
California Department of Public Health