TO: Substance Use Treatment, Behavioral Health, and Mental Health Facilities; Homeless and Housing Assistance Providers; Board and Care Facilities; Syringe Exchange Programs; Food Pantry Providers; and other programs serving people experiencing homelessness.

Subject: PREVENTING HEPATITIS A IN YOUR FACILITIES – January 16, 2019

(This communication supersedes the versions sent in 2017.)

Large outbreaks of hepatitis A infections are continuing in multiple states around the nation. Most people who have become ill in these outbreaks have experienced homelessness or use illicit drugs (injection or non-injection). Although there is not currently a hepatitis A outbreak in California, persons in the risk groups may travel to California from states experiencing outbreaks. For example, people from states experiencing outbreaks may be referred to substance use treatment facilities in California. This update is a reminder that you can protect your clients against hepatitis A infection.

Hepatitis A virus is shed in feces and easily spread through contaminated food or drink, sexual contact, or touching contaminated objects and then the mouth. People infected with hepatitis A virus who do not thoroughly wash their hands after defecating can spread hepatitis A to others. Hepatitis A illness is typically self-limited, but it can be severe and even fatal in people with underlying health conditions, particularly those with chronic liver diseases such as alcoholic cirrhosis, hepatitis B infection, and hepatitis C infection. Vaccination against hepatitis A is the most effective way to prevent infection.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) strongly recommends that your facility follow the steps below to help protect your clients from hepatitis A:

- Routinely offer hepatitis A vaccine onsite if possible, or recommend that clients get vaccinated offsite.
  - 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.
  - Contact your local health department to identify clinics that offer vaccine at no cost for patients who are uninsured.
  - 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.
• **Remind staff and clients to wash their hands 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.

• **Assess clients for potential signs of hepatitis A infection during and after intake.**
  
  o 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.
  
  o Refer people with signs of hepatitis A for medical evaluation and
  
  o Report these suspected cases to your [local health department](#) right away.

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