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Update on Outbreaks of Hepatitis A among People Who Use Drugs and People Experiencing Homelessness across the United States: Recommendations for California Healthcare Providers and Community Partners

[Multiple states across the country have reported outbreaks of hepatitis A](#), primarily among people who use drugs and people experiencing homelessness. Since the hepatitis A outbreaks were first identified in 2016, 25,484 cases, 15,330 (60%) hospitalizations, and 254 deaths as a result of hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection have been reported in the United States. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) recommends that healthcare providers, public health departments, correctional facilities, and programs providing services to affected populations vaccinate at-risk groups against hepatitis A, applying the updated [recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#).

HAV is highly transmissible from person-to-person. States experiencing large-scale outbreaks have reported that widespread transmission has occurred rapidly after initial cases were recognized. For many states, this has resulted in an unprecedented number of hepatitis A cases among unvaccinated adults since hepatitis A vaccine became available in 1996, and has led to prolonged community outbreaks that have been challenging and costly to control. Outbreaks are currently occurring in more than half of the states in the US, including Arizona, Washington, and Nevada. [California's recent hepatitis A outbreak \(involving 708 cases, mostly in San Diego County but also affecting Santa Cruz, Los Angeles, and Monterey Counties\) was contained in early 2018](#). However, the state continues to see cases of HAV infection in the affected populations, and another outbreak could occur if the virus is introduced into a setting where the proportion of immunized/immune persons is low.

Offer Vaccination to Risk Groups to Prevent an Outbreak

The best way to prevent HAV infection is through vaccination with the hepatitis A vaccine. The following groups are at highest risk for acquiring HAV infection or developing serious complications from HAV infection and should be offered the hepatitis A vaccine:

- **People who use drugs (injection or non-injection)**
- **People experiencing homelessness**
- **Men who have sex with men (MSM)**
- **People with chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C**

While cases of hepatitis A in returning travelers are not commonly associated with outbreaks, [travelers to hepatitis A-endemic countries](#) should be offered immunization prior to travel.



One dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine has been shown to control outbreaks of hepatitis A and provides up to 95% seroprotection in healthy individuals. Pre-vaccination serologic testing is not required to administer hepatitis A vaccine. Vaccinations should not be postponed if vaccination history cannot be obtained or records are unavailable. As of February 15, 2019, [ACIP recommends hepatitis A vaccination for people experiencing homelessness](#).

Providers should **screen** patients for the risk factors above, and **recommend** and **administer** hepatitis A vaccine to at-risk patients. Immunizations should be recorded in the [California Immunization Registry \(CAIR\)](#) or your local immunization registry.

Promptly Diagnose and Report HAV Infections

Consider hepatitis A as a diagnosis in anyone with jaundice or clinically compatible symptoms, and order HAV IgM testing as appropriate. Rapidly report all persons diagnosed with hepatitis A to your [county's public health department](#) to ensure timely case investigation and follow-up of contacts. Inclusion of risk factor and locating information for the patient on the Confidential Morbidity Report form will facilitate prompt public health investigation and follow-up.

For More Information

CDPH's Hepatitis A webpage.

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/Hepatitis-A.aspx>

Hepatitis A flyers and posters (click on Adults tab; Hepatitis A section)

<http://eziz.org/resources/immunization-promo-materials/>

CDC's Hepatitis A Outbreak webpage.

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/2017March-HepatitisA.htm>

MMWR. *Hepatitis A Virus Outbreaks Associated with Drug Use and Homelessness – California, Kentucky, Michigan, and Utah, 2017*.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6743a3.htm>

CDC's Hepatitis A Virus website. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm>

Hepatitis A General Fact Sheet.

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/pdfs/hepageneralfactsheet.pdf>

CDC's The Pink Book (Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases). Chapter 9: Hepatitis A. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/hepa.pdf>