

<b>DATE:</b>	April 18, 2023
<b>TO:</b>	Health Alert Network
<b>FROM:</b>	Debra L. Bogen, MD, FAAP, Acting Secretary of Health
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Outbreak of Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) Infections in SE Pennsylvania</b>
<b>DISTRIBUTION:</b>	Statewide
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Statewide
<b>STREET ADDRESS:</b>	n/a
<b>COUNTY:</b>	n/a
<b>MUNICIPALITY:</b>	n/a
<b>ZIP CODE:</b>	n/a

**This transmission is a “Health Advisory” provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.**

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

**Summary**

- Since 2017, multiple states including Pennsylvania have experienced large, ongoing hepatitis A outbreaks primarily affecting people who use drugs and/or people experiencing homelessness.
- **Hepatitis A person-to-person transmission continues in 2023, particularly in southeastern PA.**
- In 2023, 46 confirmed hepatitis A cases were reported in PA as of April 8, 2023, with 44 reported in the southeast region.
- **Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is encouraging [hepatitis A vaccination](#) for persons experiencing homelessness, persons who use drugs or those who have other risk factors for hepatitis A, such as men who have sex with men (MSM).**
- Provide hepatitis A vaccination for close or sexual contacts of known cases.
- Please report any suspected clusters of hepatitis A by calling DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department. Additionally, all cases of hepatitis A should be reported via PA-NEDSS.

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable, liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). Severity of illness ranges from mild infection lasting a few weeks to severe disease lasting several months. Liver failure and death may occur. Hepatitis A usually spreads when a person unknowingly ingests the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated by undetectable amounts of stool from an infected person. Hepatitis A can also spread from close personal contact with an infected person such as through sex or caring for someone who is ill. Populations at particular risk include persons who use injection and non-injection drugs, persons who are experiencing homelessness, men who have sex with men (MSM), and persons who live in congregate settings such as correctional facilities and drug and alcohol treatment facilities, as well as contacts of people with these risk factors.

Pennsylvania experienced an increase of hepatitis A cases from 2018 to 2019 with over 650 cases reported in 2019. Hepatitis A cases decreased substantially in 2020, but began to increase again in 2021, particularly in the northeastern and southeastern areas of the state and among persons who use

drugs and/or experience homelessness. We continue to see person-to-person transmission of hepatitis A in 2023, particularly in southeastern Pennsylvania. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) released a similar hepatitis A [Health Alert](#) in 2023 describing hepatitis A case counts increasing among people who use drugs and/or people who are experiencing homeless.

## Hepatitis A Recommendations for Health Care Providers

1. Consider hepatitis A in anyone with jaundice or elevated liver enzymes and clinically compatible symptoms of hepatitis.
2. Confirm a hepatitis A diagnosis by testing serum for presence of immunoglobulin M (IgM) antibodies to hepatitis A virus.
3. Encourage persons who were recently exposed to hepatitis A virus (HAV) and who were not previously vaccinated to be vaccinated with one dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG) as soon as possible, **within 2 weeks after initial exposure**. Guidelines vary by age and health status (please see <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/InterimOutbreakGuidance-HAV-VaccineAdmin.htm> for additional information).
4. Consider saving serum samples for additional testing to assist public health officials in the investigation of transmission (i.e., confirmation of antibody test, HAV RNA test, genotyping, and sequencing). Contact DOH or your local county or municipal health department for assistance with submitting specimens for molecular characterization.
5. Ensure all persons diagnosed with hepatitis A are reported to the DOH web-based electronic disease surveillance system, [PA-NEDSS](#):
6. CDC recommends the following groups be [vaccinated](#) against hepatitis A:
  - a. All children aged 12-23 months
  - b. All children aged 2-18 years who have not previously received hepatitis A vaccine
  - c. Persons who are at increased risk for infection:
    - i. Persons traveling to or working in countries that have high or intermediate endemicity of hepatitis A ([Destinations | Travelers' Health | CDC](#));
    - ii. Men who have sex with men;
    - iii. Persons who use injection and non-injection drugs;
    - iv. Persons who have occupational risk for infection (e.g., those who work with hepatitis A in research laboratories);
    - v. Household members and other close personal contacts or adopted children newly arriving from countries with high or intermediate hepatitis A endemicity;
    - vi. Persons with direct contact with persons who have hepatitis A, including sexual contacts;
    - vii. Pregnant women at risk for hepatitis A or risk for severe outcome from hepatitis A infection; and
    - viii. **Patients aged 12 months and older who are currently homeless or who have had periods of homelessness in the past (newly approved Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' (ACIP) recommendation).**
  - d. Persons who are at increased risk for complications from hepatitis A, including people with chronic liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C and persons with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).
  - e. Any person wishing to obtain immunity.
7. Please report any suspected clusters of Hepatitis A by calling DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department. Additionally, all cases of hepatitis A should be reported via PA-NEDSS.

This information is current as of April 18, 2023, but may be modified in the future.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.