

DATE:	February 24, 2024
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Debra L. Bogen, MD, FAAP, Acting Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) in a Food Handler, Erie, Pennsylvania
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	n/a
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Advisory,” and 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

- The Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH), supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH), is investigating a confirmed case of hepatitis A in a food handler who worked while infectious at the Cracker Barrel restaurant located at 7810 Interstate Dr., Erie, PA, 16509.
- People who worked or consumed food or drinks prepared at the Interstate Drive Cracker Barrel location between January 30 and February 21, 2024, should watch for any symptoms of hepatitis A and seek care if they become symptomatic.
- Additionally, people who worked or consumed food or drinks prepared at the Interstate Drive Cracker Barrel location between February 9 and February 21, 2024, should consider getting vaccinated against hepatitis A as soon as possible, ideally within two weeks of being at the restaurant, if they were not vaccinated in the past.
- Healthcare providers should consider hepatitis A as a diagnosis in anyone with jaundice or elevated liver enzymes and clinically compatible symptoms of acute hepatitis. Confirm a hepatitis A diagnosis by testing serum for presence of immunoglobulin M (IgM) antibodies to hepatitis A virus. Report all cases to PA’s reportable disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS.
- Laboratories should save serum samples for **at least 10 days** to assist public health officials in the investigation of transmission.
- Any confirmed or suspected cases of hepatitis A that dined at this restaurant between January 30 and February 21, 2024, and who are Erie County residents should be reported to ECDOH by calling 814-451-6707. For cases in other PA jurisdictions, please call PADOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH 1 (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department.

ECDOH and PADOH are investigating a confirmed case of hepatitis A in a food handler who worked while infectious at the Cracker Barrel restaurant located at 7810 Interstate Dr., Erie, PA 16509. Restaurant staff who worked at the restaurant and patrons who consumed food and/or drinks prepared by the restaurant between January 30, 2024, and February 21, 2024, may have been exposed to the hepatitis A virus.

Recommendations for those exposed

1. While the risk of being infected is low, people who worked or consumed food or drinks prepared at the Interstate Drive Cracker Barrel between **January 30, 2024, and February 21, 2024**, including persons who consumed take out, should watch for any symptoms of hepatitis A and wash hands frequently. Symptoms may appear two to seven weeks after exposure. If they develop any hepatitis A-related symptoms, they should contact their primary care provider for evaluation and possible testing for hepatitis A.
2. Additionally, people who worked or consumed food or drinks prepared at the Interstate Drive Cracker Barrel should consider getting vaccinated against hepatitis A, ideally within two weeks of their exposure. Currently, this may include people who worked at or consumed food from the restaurant between **February 9, 2024, and February 21, 2024**. People who have previously received two doses of hepatitis A vaccine OR have had hepatitis A in the past do not need to be vaccinated. People born after 2006 may have been [vaccinated as a child](#), but if unsure, vaccination is recommended. If assistance in getting hepatitis A vaccine is needed, Erie County residents should contact ECDOH by calling 814-451-6707. Others should contact PADOH by calling 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or their local health department.

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). It can range in severity from mild infection lasting a few weeks to severe disease lasting several months. Hepatitis A can rarely be fatal or result in a need for a liver transplant. Hepatitis A usually spreads when a person unknowingly ingests the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated by small, undetected 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. People infected with hepatitis A usually develop symptoms two to seven weeks after they had contact with the virus. **Symptoms can vary and may include diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice, fever, fatigue, stomach pain, or dark urine.** There is no medication to treat hepatitis A, but infection can be prevented through vaccination.

Additional Recommendations for Health Care Providers

1. Consider hepatitis A as a diagnosis in anyone with jaundice or elevated liver enzymes and clinically compatible symptoms of acute hepatitis. In addition, consider asking those with general acute gastroenteritis symptoms about any known hepatitis A exposures.
2. Confirm a hepatitis A diagnosis by testing serum for presence of IgM antibodies to HAV.
3. Encourage persons who were exposed recently to HAV and who are not vaccinated to be vaccinated with one dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine or IG as soon as possible, **within 2 weeks of last exposure**. Guidelines vary by age and health status (please see <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/InterimOutbreakGuidance-HAV-VaccineAdmin.htm> for additional information). Please note that while giving hepatitis A vaccine outside of this 2-week window is not harmful, the vaccine is generally not effective for post-exposure prophylaxis if administered outside of this time frame.
4. Encourage laboratory staff to save serum samples for **at least 10 days** to assist public health officials in the investigation of transmission (i.e., confirmation of antibody test, HAV RNA test, genotyping, and sequencing). PADOH or your local county or municipal health department will contact you if serum samples are requested for molecular characterization.
5. Ensure all persons diagnosed with hepatitis A are reported to the PADOH web-based electronic disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS: <https://www.nedss.state.pa.us/nedss/default.aspx>

Please report any suspected clusters of hepatitis A by calling your local health department or **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.

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.

This information is current as of February 24, 2024 but may be modified in the future.