



**LAC DPH Health Advisory:
Detection and Prevention of Hepatitis
A among the Homeless and People
who use Illicit Drugs in Los Angeles
County**



July 31, 2017

This message is intended for infectious disease, primary care, emergency medicine, urgent care, emergency medical services, and healthcare personnel who provide services to the homeless.

Please distribute as appropriate.

Key Messages:

- Hepatitis A virus (HAV) outbreaks in persons who are homeless and/or use illicit (injection and non-injection) drugs are currently occurring in San Diego and Santa Cruz counties and have the potential to spread to Los Angeles County.
- In these outbreaks, HAV is primarily being transmitted person-to-person through close contact or through contact with a fecally contaminated environment.
- Timely identification and reporting of confirmed and suspect hepatitis A cases is critical for an effective public health response and to guide outbreak prevention strategies
- To prevent an outbreak in Los Angeles County, HAV vaccine is recommended for people who are homeless and/or use illicit drugs.

Current Situation:

Hepatitis A outbreaks are currently ongoing in San Diego and Santa Cruz counties in persons who are homeless and/or using illicit drugs. Cases also have occurred among persons who provide services to the homeless population in these counties. In San Diego County, as of July 27th there have been 275 cases and 8 deaths. In Santa Cruz County, as of July 25th there are 38 cases that have been confirmed. Cases in both counties are caused by the same genetic strain of hepatitis A virus (HAV). On July 13, 2017, the California Department of Public Health issued a [Clinical Advisory](#), 'Immunize to Prevent and Control Hepatitis A Outbreaks', describing the outbreaks and presenting recommendations for prevention. It is unknown how long the outbreaks in San Diego and Santa Cruz counties will continue, but information on the current epidemiology of these outbreaks as well as similar experiences in other communities suggest these may continue for months, perhaps longer than a year.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LAC DPH) has identified two confirmed cases of hepatitis A in homeless patients who lived in San Diego during their

exposure period as well as two secondary cases in a health facility. These cases and the proximity of Los Angeles County and San Diego highlight the possibility that additional cases may be introduced into Los Angeles County in the future and could result in an outbreak. LAC DPH is enhancing surveillance to identify HAV infection among people who are homeless and/or those who use illicit drugs. LAC DPH is also reaching out to organizations that provide services to homeless individuals to share information about the outbreaks and to encourage and support vaccination of their clients.

Actions Requested of Providers:

- **Suspect HAV infection in patients who are homeless/recently homeless and/or who use illicit drugs who have abrupt onset of prodromal symptoms (nausea, anorexia, fever, malaise, or abdominal pain) and jaundice or elevated serum aminotransferase levels.** A complete serology panel with testing for hepatitis A (for acute HAV order IgM), B, and C is recommended in symptomatic patients. HIV testing is also recommended for those with an undocumented HIV-status. Do not test asymptomatic people for HAV infection.
- **Promptly report all confirmed and suspect HAV cases to Los Angeles County Morbidity Unit by faxing a [Confidential Morbidity Report \(CMR\)](#) to 888-397-3778 or by calling 888-397-3993.** Copies of pertinent laboratory testing results and clinical notes should be included. Providers are urged to report while suspected cases are still at the healthcare facility to facilitate immediate interview by a public health investigator.
- **Provide post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for close contacts of confirmed HAV cases as directed by the public health department.** Susceptible people exposed to HAV should receive PEP as soon as possible within 2 weeks of last exposure. Single-antigen HAV vaccine and immune globulin (IG) are effective HAV PEP therapies; recommendations for PEP vary with patient age and risk for severe infection and can be found on the CDPH Hepatitis A Postexposure Prophylaxis Guidance [Quicksheet](#). Vaccination with single antigen HAV vaccine generally is recommended as part of the PEP regime to provide more long-lasting protection; exceptions include infants and in uncommon situations when vaccination is contraindicated. LAC DPH will assist in the management of contacts. Providers with questions about PEP can contact the LAC DPH Immunization Program at 213-351-7800.
- **Provide HAV vaccine to patients who are homeless and/or who use illicit drugs.** Serologic testing for HAV immunity is not recommended prior to vaccination. Seroconversion following the first dose of single-antigen HAV vaccine appears to be greater than following the first dose of the combined HAV/HBV (Twinrix®) vaccine (point estimates, 98.1% vs 91.6%). This short-term

advantage for single-antigen vaccine disappears when the respective series are completed, but may be important in providing near-term protection. Providers should consider the short-term risks of exposure to HAV, the likelihood of follow-up to complete multi-dose immunization, and the need for protection from HBV when selecting vaccine. Immunization against HAV with existing supplies should not be delayed to obtain a different formulation of vaccine. Providers should review their inventory of HAV vaccine to ensure adequate supplies for their patients. If additional inventory is needed, providers should use their customary sources to augment their vaccine supply. See the HAV Vaccine Resources section below for more information regarding vaccine coverage and availability.

- **Consider HAV vaccination for people who have frequent, ongoing close contact with homeless individuals and illicit drug users** (e.g., in homeless shelters, jails, food pantries, drug rehabilitation programs). While occupational exposure does not warrant a routine recommendation, given contact with people at risk of HAV infection and in the setting of a potential outbreak, vaccine may be administered to those who wish to reduce their risk of HAV infection, consistent with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) [recommendation](#). Persons working with homeless and/or illicit drug using populations should also be rigorous in hand washing.

HAV Vaccine Resources

Medi-Cal: HAV vaccine is covered for patients enrolled in both fee-for-service and managed care plans. Vaccine administration is covered if administered in a provider's office or by an in-network pharmacy. No prior authorization is required. Patients or those assisting them can call the Plan's member services number listed on the back of their Medi-Cal Benefits Identification Card to obtain information on pharmacy services. Prior to referring a patient to an in-network pharmacy for HAV vaccination, please contact the pharmacy to verify current availability of the HAV vaccine.

AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP): HAV vaccine is included on the ADAP formulary.

LAC DPH will have free HAV vaccine available at its Public Health Centers for all under-insured and uninsured patients at higher risk for developing disease, including people who are homeless and illicit drug users. Please see the following web link for clinic times and locations: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chs/Docs/ImmSchedule.pdf>.

In addition, LAC DPH will be conducting outreach clinics to offer HAV vaccine in conjunction with community partners that serve the homeless community.

For Questions:

Los Angeles County DPH Acute Communicable Disease Control Program:

Weekdays 8:30am-5pm: call 213-240-7941

After hours: call 213-974-1234 and ask for the physician on call.

**Reporting for Residents of Long Beach and Pasadena
Long Beach Health and Human Services:**

Weekdays 8am-5pm: call 562-570-4302

After hours: call 562-435-6711 and ask for Communicable Disease Officer.

Pasadena Public Health Department:

Weekdays 8am-5pm: call the Communicable Disease Control Program 626-744-6089

After hours: call 626-744-6043.

Additional Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Hepatitis A Information for Healthcare Providers: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hepa/hcp/index.html>
- CDC, Hepatitis A Questions and Answers for Health Professionals: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/havfaq.htm>
- CDC, Hepatitis A General Fact Sheet (for patients): <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/pdfs/hepageneralfactsheet.pdf>
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Hepatitis A Website: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/Hepatitis-A.aspx>
- CDPH, Hepatitis A Public Health Investigation Guidance Quicksheet: <https://archive.cdph.ca.gov/programs/immunize/Documents/CDPHHAVQuicksheet.pdf>
- San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency, Hepatitis A: http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/dc/Hepatitis_A.html
- Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency, Hepatitis A: <http://www.santacruzhealth.org/HSAHome/HSADivisions/PublicHealth/CommunicableDiseaseControl/HepatitisA.aspx>

This Health Advisory was sent by Dr. Sharon Balter, Chief, Acute Communicable Disease Control Program, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

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