



## Hepatitis A Summary and Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 9/20/2017

### Summary of California's Hepatitis A Outbreaks and Yolo County's Situational Status

Since early 2017, local jurisdictions within the State of California have been investigating Hepatitis A outbreaks. These investigations are ongoing and span from the southern-most jurisdictions up the coast to the southern Bay Area. Controlling the outbreak has presented challenges because of many factors. An individual generally will not show symptoms of Hepatitis A until 2-4 weeks after being exposed to the infection. Illicit drug users and homeless populations make up the majority of confirmed cases of Hepatitis A. These individuals are difficult to contact and often live in environments and have lifestyles that promote the spread of the infection.

Hepatitis A is primarily spread through close person-to-person contact with fecal contaminated environments. No specific common sources of food, beverages, or drugs have been directly tied to the rapid spread of this infection but investigations are ongoing. Multiple jurisdictions are collaborating with health care partners to offer vaccinations to high risk populations. At this time, Yolo County has no confirmed cases of Hepatitis A. However, Yolo County and the surrounding jurisdictions are closely monitoring reports and are ready to respond accordingly. Yolo County's current efforts are focused on providing education about Hepatitis A, its transmission, prevention, and supporting local health care partners in vaccinating high risk populations.



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### Frequently Asked Questions

#### ***What is Hepatitis A?***

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. The virus is primarily spread when an uninfected (and unvaccinated) person ingests food or water that is contaminated with the feces of an infected person.

#### ***How is the infection spread?***

The hepatitis A virus is transmitted primarily by the fecal-oral route; that is when a person ingests food or water that has been contaminated with the feces of an infected person. In families, this may happen though dirty hands when an infected person prepares food for family members. Waterborne outbreaks, though infrequent, are usually associated with sewage-contaminated or inadequately treated water.

The virus can also be transmitted through close physical contact with an infectious person, although casual contact among people does not spread the virus.

#### ***What are the symptoms?***

The incubation period of hepatitis A is usually 14–28 days.

Symptoms of hepatitis A range from mild to severe, and can include fever, malaise, loss of appetite, diarrhea, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark-colored urine and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes). Not everyone who is infected will have all of the symptoms.

Adults have signs and symptoms of illness more often than children. The severity of disease and fatal outcomes are higher in older age groups. Infected children under 6 years of age do not usually experience noticeable symptoms, and only 10% develop jaundice. Among older children and adults, infection usually causes more severe symptoms, with jaundice occurring in more than 70% of cases.

#### ***Who is at risk?***

Anyone who has not been vaccinated or previously infected can get infected with hepatitis A virus. Risk factors include:

- poor sanitation;
- lack of safe water;
- use of recreational drugs;
- living in a household with an infected person;
- being a sexual partner of someone with acute hepatitis A infection; and
- travelling to areas where there is a high incidence of Hepatitis A without being immunized.



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### ***How is Hepatitis A infection diagnosed?***

Hepatitis A is diagnosed by a blood test. The most common test detects antibodies against Hepatitis A in the blood.

### ***What is the treatment for Hepatitis A infection?***

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. Recovery from symptoms following infection may be slow and may take several weeks or months. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and medication against vomiting should not be given. Some medicines can cause further stress to the liver.

Hospitalization is usually not necessary unless a person develops liver failure.

### ***How can the spread of Hepatitis A infection be prevented?***

Good personal hygiene practices such as regular hand-washing, proper sanitation, safe food handling practices, and immunization are the most effective ways to combat hepatitis A.

### ***Who should be vaccinated?***

The following categories of people are routinely recommended to get the Hepatitis A vaccine by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Prevention Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices:

- Users of injection and non-injection illegal drugs
- People with chronic liver conditions, such as cirrhosis, chronic Hepatitis C, and chronic Hepatitis B
- Men who have sex with men
- Travelers to countries with high or medium rates of Hepatitis A virus
- Persons with clotting factor disorders
- Any person who wishes to be immune to Hepatitis A

### ***Is the Hepatitis A vaccine safe and effective?***

Yes, the vaccine is safe and highly effective in preventing Hepatitis A virus infection. You will be protected approximately 2 to 4 weeks after the first injection and longer-term defense is gained with the second injection. If you do not remember whether you were vaccinated, repeating the vaccination series is not harmful.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), before the Hepatitis A vaccine became available in 1995, more than 25,000 people developed Hepatitis A each year in the United States. In 2014, there were about 2,500 cases reported. In 1999, routine vaccination was recommended by the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for children in high-incidence states including California and in 2006, routine vaccination was recommended in all states. Millions of people have received injectable inactivated hepatitis A vaccine worldwide with no serious adverse events.



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### ***I routinely work with homeless and/or illicit drug users. What precautions should I take?***

Most employees have a low risk of contracting Hepatitis A as long as they comply with hand-washing and other personal hygiene regulations implemented within their organizations. Your best defense is to use standard precautions AND get vaccinated.

Under usual (non-outbreak) circumstances, occupational exposure does not warrant a routine recommendation to get Hepatitis A virus vaccination. With the current outbreak situations within the State of California the Yolo County Health Officer has advised that all personnel continue to take standard precautions but may turn to their regular health care provider for the Hepatitis A vaccination.

### ***What can local businesses do?***

- Remind employees of the importance of hand-washing with soap and warm water after using the bathroom and before preparing, serving, or eating food.
- Maintain routine and consistent cleaning of bathrooms for employees and the public using a chlorine-based disinfectant (i.e. Bleach) with a ratio of 1 and 2/3 cup of bleach to one gallon of water. Due to the high bleach concentration of this mix, rinse surfaces with water after 1 minute of contact time and wear gloves while cleaning.
- For employees in physical contact with others, especially those at risk for Hepatitis A, wear disposable gloves and wash hands after each encounter.
- Coordinate with your occupational health provider to determine if Hepatitis A vaccine should be offered to employees.

### ***Where can I go for more information or additional assistance?***

If more information is needed or you need additional assistance, contact your personal health care provider, occupational health provider, or call the following hotlines available 24 hrs/day, 7 days/week:

California AIDS, STD, and Hepatitis Hotline: 800-367-AIDS (2437)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Information Hotline: 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

You can also contact your local Yolo County Health and Human Services Agency Communicable Disease Team or Medical Health Operational Area Coordinator (MHOAC) via the following:

Business Hours: Monday – Friday 8am to 5pm (530) 666-8645, Fax (530) 669-1549

After Business Hours (MHOAC): (530) 321-3620 (24 hrs/day, 7 days/week)