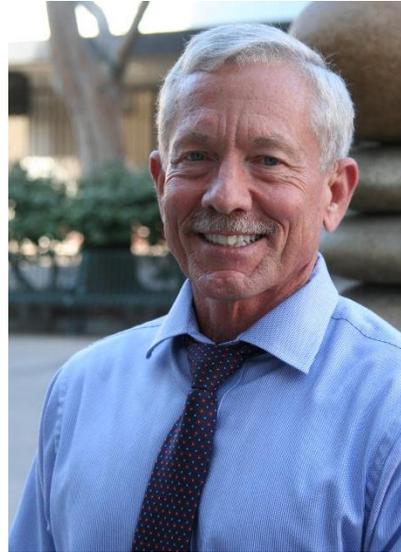


To *Your* HEALTH *Fresno County*

Highlighting public health issues and ways to improve personal, family, neighborhood and community health



What You Need to Know About Hepatitis A

November 13, 2017

As of November 3, 2017, an outbreak of hepatitis A in San Diego, Santa Cruz, and Los Angeles Counties has resulted in 644 cases, 420 hospitalizations, and 21 deaths since November 2016. It is the largest person-to-person hepatitis A outbreak in the U.S. since the vaccine for the illness became available in 1996.

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable viral infection of the liver that is highly contagious and transmitted by the fecal-oral route either through person-to-person contact or consumption of food or water contaminated with the virus.

Symptoms of fever, malaise, jaundice, poor appetite, nausea, abdominal pain, and dark colored urine begin suddenly 15 to 50 days after exposure. Most individuals infected recover without treatment fairly quickly, and about 70% of children under 6 years of age that contract the illness have no symptoms.

Severe disease is rare, but can occur and result in death, especially for those with underlying liver disease (as is the case for many of the victims in Southern California).

Risk for infection with hepatitis A is increased for:

- Travelers to areas with high rates of endemic hepatitis A infection
- Men who have sex with men
- Users of injection and non-injection illegal drugs
- Homeless populations

Individuals with hepatitis A are infectious to others from two weeks before the onset of jaundice to one week after the onset of jaundice. Infants and young children may be infectious for longer periods.

To date this year ten cases of hepatitis A have been reported to the Fresno County Department of Public Health (FCDPH). None of these cases are related to the outbreak in Southern California and none have occurred within the same population being affected there.

FCDPH staff question individuals with hepatitis A about others they may have exposed to the illness. Those identified individuals are contacted and offered vaccine (and/or immunoglobulin in individuals at high risk for severe disease) to prevent illness.

The primary means of protecting yourself and your loved ones from hepatitis A infection is by vaccination. The vaccine has been routinely recommended for children in California since 1999. Adults routinely recommended to receive the hepatitis A vaccine include:

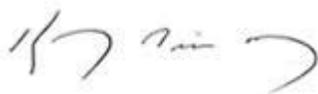
- Individuals known to have been exposed to hepatitis A
- Persons with chronic liver disease
- Men who have sex with men
- Persons using illicit drugs, other than marijuana
- Individuals receiving clotting factor concentrates
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A infection is common

The vaccine is quite effective. The first dose is more than 95% effective in preventing the illness. The second dose (given 6 months after the first) is nearly 100% effective.

Second to vaccination in the prevention of hepatitis A is frequent and proper handwashing. Hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and water after using the restroom, sneezing, coughing, changing diapers, and cleaning surfaces, and before and after any food preparation and service. Hand sanitizers are not effective against the hepatitis A virus.

Because of the aggressive public health response to the outbreak in Southern California, it appears to have peaked. These same measures of vaccination of identified contacts, vaccination of potential contacts, and careful attention to environmental disinfection would be employed here should a similar outbreak develop, and FCDPH is monitoring for hepatitis A cases very closely.

Here's to your health!



Dr. Ken Bird, Fresno County Health Officer

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