

A Guide for First Responders

- ❖ The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) has identified an increase in the number of hepatitis A cases among persons reporting homelessness, drug use, Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and recent incarceration.
- ❖ This increase in cases was initially observed in Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester counties. However, we have seen increases in cases in several other counties in the state. This increase is not unique to New Jersey as several other states are also reporting similar increases.
- ❖ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been working to coordinate response activities of the impacted states and is encouraging prevention efforts including education and vaccination outreach.
- ❖ Information regarding Hepatitis A and steps you can take to protect yourself can be found below.

WHAT IS HEPATITIS A?

Hepatitis (hep-ah-ty-tis) A is a liver disease. It is caused by infection with the hepatitis A virus (HAV).

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HAV?

People infected with HAV may have no symptoms or they may have several symptoms including:

- * Fever
- * Fatigue
- * Poor appetite
- * Dark yellow urine
- * Stomach Pain
- * Diarrhea
- * Vomiting
- * Yellow skin or eyes

Symptoms of HAV usually appear within 3 to 4 weeks after infection. They may appear as quickly as 15 days (about 2 weeks) or may take as long as 50 days (about 2 months).

HOW DO PEOPLE GET HAV?

Hepatitis A spreads by putting something in your mouth (object, food, or drink) that has been in contact with the feces (poop) of an infected person. The item may have a small or undetectable amount of feces and may not be visibly soiled. Hepatitis A can be spread:

- * When an individual does not wash their hands after contact with infected stool (e.g., after using the bathroom or changing diapers)
- * By having sexual contact with an infected partner/person
- * By consuming food or drinks that are contaminated by the virus
- * By handling items that have been contaminated and not washing your hands after handling that item

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IS HEPATITIS A VACCINE ROUTINELY RECOMMENDED FOR FIRST RESPONDERS?

No. HAV vaccine is not routinely recommended for first responders as the risk of getting infected can be minimized by using simple precautions. These include:

- * Hand hygiene (wash with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub) after having contact with another individual and before touching or consuming food.
- * When there is a potential for contact with infectious materials (e.g., stool), gloves should be worn.
- * Gloves should be used only **during** patient care and removed before performing other tasks to avoid contaminating other surfaces. Hand hygiene should be performed after gloves are removed.

HOW CAN FIRST RESPONDERS PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM INFECTION?

- * There is a hepatitis A vaccine which offers protection against HAV.
- * Currently there are no recommendations for first responders to get vaccinated in response to this outbreak.
- * Hand washing and appropriate use of Standard Precautions should provide protection against communicable diseases, including hepatitis A.
- * Persons wanting to obtain immunity who have never been ill with hepatitis A or were not previously vaccinated, should discuss vaccination with their healthcare provider.



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