

## A Guide for Addictions Professionals

- ❖ The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) has identified an increase in the number of hepatitis A cases among persons reporting homelessness, persons who use drugs, Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and those who have been or are currently incarcerated.
- ❖ 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 at-risk individuals can be found below.

### WHAT IS HEPATITIS A?

Hepatitis 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
- \* Stomach Pain
- \* Fatigue
- \* Diarrhea
- \* Poor appetite
- \* Vomiting
- \* Dark yellow urine
- \* 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 those items

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## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF HAV AMONG AT-RISK GROUPS?

- Promote vaccinations. The HAV vaccine is a safe and effective way to prevent the spread of hepatitis. Providing vaccine to at-risk groups is recommended. Local health departments can provide assistance with education and identifying sources of vaccine.
- Keep hands clean by washing with soap and water. This should be done after using the bathroom and before preparing or eating food. Clean hands save lives.
- Do not share drugs and injecting equipment (needles, syringes, cotton, cookers, spoons, etc.).
- Use condoms during sex. HAV can be spread during sex by someone who has the virus, even if they have no symptoms.

## HOW IS THE CURRENT HAV OUTBREAK DIFFERENT FROM OTHER HAV OUTBREAKS?

NJDOH often sees cases of HAV among individuals who travel to countries with unsanitary conditions and among food handlers and people who work directly with food.

The current HAV outbreak is impacting different groups due to poor sanitation and lack of hand hygiene, homelessness and/or unstable housing, drug use, sharing of drug equipment, sexual activities, incarceration and direct contact with a person infected with HAV.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of HAV among at-risk populations. Recommending HAV vaccination to individuals who are at-risk will help to reduce transmission. While the HAV series consists of two shots, one shot is more than 90% effective.



PHOTO credit: Cynthia Griggs

For more information about HAV:  
NJDOH  
[www.nj.gov/health/cd](http://www.nj.gov/health/cd)

CDC  
[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm)