

Boston Public Health Commission
Massachusetts Department of Public Health



Public Health Advisory – Hepatitis A



Massachusetts and Boston continue to investigate sporadic cases of hepatitis A Virus (HAV) infection. Thus far, year to date, there have been 31 reported cases in Massachusetts, 5 of which were reported in Boston. This compares to 49 statewide and 7 in Boston to date, last year. Although the numbers of confirmed cases has been small, the early stages of a problem can be missed and events in other parts of the country (see below) suggest that preventive measures and vigilance would be prudent.

Traditional risk factors associated with hepatitis A include travel to countries where HAV infection is endemic and close personal contact with an infected household member or sex partner, particularly among men who have sex with men. Prompt reporting, control measures, and immunization of close contacts have prevented widespread transmission of infection within our communities.

Outbreak control among the homeless, however, can be difficult. Since early 2017, San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency has been actively investigating a large, local hepatitis A outbreak prompting declaration of a local public health emergency. As of September 19, 2017, there have been 444 confirmed cases associated with this outbreak, including 16 deaths; 69% of affected persons have required hospitalization. The main factors associated with hepatitis A in this outbreak are homelessness, drug use, and living in dense living conditions with shared restrooms. Ongoing infection is transmitted via person-to-person contact and contact with a fecally-contaminated environment. The majority of the cases had a known indication for hepatitis A vaccination, but none had been fully vaccinated.

Vaccination and soap and water hand-hygiene are the best prevention strategies for hepatitis A infection. **Healthcare workers are encouraged to be alert for persons at risk for hepatitis A and to offer vaccination to those under- or un-immunized at point of contact. Higher risk populations include individuals who are experiencing homelessness or work with the homeless, use illicit drugs, have chronic liver disease, or men who have sex with men.**

City and state regulations require healthcare providers and institutions to report all cases of hepatitis A diagnosed in Boston to the Boston Public Health Commission (Phone: 617-534-5611,

24/7 coverage available). Laboratories in Boston must report all positive test results for acute hepatitis A infection (e.g., anti-HAV IgM). Cases diagnosed outside Boston should be reported to the local board of health where the diagnosis is made or to Massachusetts Department of Public Health (Phone: 617-983-6800, epidemiologists available 24/7).

Reporting forms for healthcare providers and for laboratories are available at:
<http://www.bphc.org/cdc>

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