



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Hepatitis A Outbreak Alert for Homelessness Service Providers

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) announced an outbreak of hepatitis A within Washington State on July 30, 2019. The hepatitis A outbreak is affecting people in multiple counties (King, Pend Oreille, Snohomish and Spokane) who are living homeless or who use drugs.

The case count is updated regularly on the DOH website at www.doh.wa.gov/hepatitisA2019, where you can also find educational resources and guidelines for prevention. There are hepatitis A outbreaks across the United States with an increased rate of deaths. Learn more at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HepAOutbreak.

Hepatitis A virus infects the liver. Typically there are severe gastrointestinal symptoms (dark urine, clay-colored stools) and jaundice (yellowed eyes). The virus is shed in stool for about three weeks before and after symptoms. It is spread by contact with people who are infected or through food, beverages, ice, and objects contaminated by unwashed hands. The virus is more easily spread in areas where sanitary conditions are poor. Details on cleaning and disinfecting procedures are included below.

A safe, effective vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis A. People who are at high risk of becoming infected should get vaccinated. Hepatitis A vaccine can be obtained through healthcare providers, pharmacies, or the local health jurisdiction. Groups with higher risk for hepatitis A include: travelers to countries with higher disease rates, gay and bisexual men, users of any illicit drugs, and people with clotting factor disorders. People experiencing homelessness are considered at increased risk of hepatitis A infection in the current outbreak due to lack of access to sanitation. They should be referred for vaccination when possible.

If you notice increased illnesses or possible hepatitis A cases in your facility, contact your local health jurisdiction (www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions). For questions about hepatitis A vaccine or vaccine recommendations, email DOH at oiqp@doh.wa.gov. We appreciate your partnership in preventing hepatitis A infection.

Sincerely,

Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH
State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases

Additional information

Cleaning and disinfecting procedures

Chlorine bleach is an effective disinfectant against the virus on most hard surfaces. Mix as recommended below and use the solution promptly. Allow 1-2 minutes of contact time and then rinse with water. For more information on cleaning and other educational resources, visit www.doh.wa.gov/hepatitisA2019. When preparing or using a bleach solution, use proper personal protection.

For a 5000 parts per million bleach solution:

- If using 8.25% bleach: mix 1 cup bleach with 1 gallon water.
- If using 5.25% bleach: mix 1.5 cups bleach with 1 gallon water.

Use the bleach solution for stainless steel, food/mouth contact items, tile floors, nonporous surfaces, counters, sinks, and toilets. Prepare fresh solution daily and date. Don't save the bleach and water mix. The solution stops working after 24 hours.

For other cleaning options, the product label should say "effective against hepatitis A" or "effective against feline calicivirus." Follow instructions on the label.

Hepatitis A vaccine recommendations for people experiencing homelessness

www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6806a6.htm