



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Hepatitis A Outbreak Alert for Substance Use Treatment 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. A safe, effective vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis A. People at high risk of becoming infected should get vaccinated, including people with a history of homelessness or drug use.

DOH is working to increase access to vaccine for populations at highest risk in this outbreak, including people who are living homeless or using drugs. Most employees have a low risk of contracting hepatitis A if they comply with hand-washing and other hygiene requirements for their jobs. Coordinate with your occupational health provider to determine if hepatitis A vaccine should be offered to employees.

Opioid treatment programs (OTPs) wishing to order, store, and dispense hepatitis A vaccine must either get a health care entity license or have a prescribing provider order, store, and dispense the medication under their license. OTPs have statutory authority to order, store, and dispense medication for treatment of opioid use disorder, alcohol use disorder, tobacco use disorder, and opioid overdose only. For details, see Pharmacy Commission guidance at www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/2300/2019/690329.pdf.

For any questions related to possible hepatitis A cases, 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Lindquist".

Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH
State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases