

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 9, 2019

Contact:

Jennifer Miller, 608-266-1683

Elizabeth Goodsitt, 608-266-1683

Health Officials Encourage Vaccination Against Hepatitis A

In light of ongoing, significant outbreaks of [hepatitis A](#) throughout the country, state health officials are encouraging vaccination against the hepatitis A virus. Although there is not a current outbreak in Wisconsin, the state did have four cases of hepatitis A reported earlier this year. Outbreaks have occurred in other Midwest states, including Illinois, and preparation for such an outbreak in Wisconsin is ongoing. Each year Wisconsin typically has 10-30 cases of hepatitis A reported.

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious disease that is spread from person to person and is found in the feces (poop) of people infected with the virus. Hepatitis A is different from hepatitis B and hepatitis C. While all three cause damage to the liver, they are caused by different viruses and are spread in different ways. Hepatitis A is spread primarily by eating or drinking food or water with the virus in it. It can also be spread by sharing drugs or drug works, or having sexual contact with someone infected with hepatitis A.

Infection from hepatitis A is preventable with a vaccine, which anyone can get. The vaccine for hepatitis A is different from the vaccine for hepatitis B. Most adults in Wisconsin have not yet been vaccinated for hepatitis A.

Some groups are at higher risk than others to get hepatitis A. People who should be vaccinated for hepatitis A include:

- Travelers to places where hepatitis A is common or where outbreaks are happening.
- People who use drugs (injection or non-injection, including marijuana).
- People who are experiencing homelessness.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People who are, or were recently incarcerated.
- People with direct contact with others who have hepatitis A.
- People with chronic or long-term liver disease, including hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- People with blood clotting disorders.
- All children one year of age or older.
- Anyone else who wishes to be protected against hepatitis A.

Symptoms of hepatitis A can develop two to seven weeks after being exposed to the virus. Symptoms may include, fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting, stomach pain, dark urine, grey-colored poop, joint pain, and yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice).

Symptoms usually last less than two months but may last as long as six months. Some people with hepatitis A do not have any symptoms, and infants and young children tend to have very mild or no symptoms. People can spread the disease for two weeks before symptoms start.

There is no treatment for hepatitis A. Most people recover by eating well, getting enough rest and drinking fluids, but some people may need to be cared for in a hospital while recovering. In rare cases, hepatitis A can cause liver failure and death, so prevention is important.

The hepatitis A vaccine is very effective. While thoroughly washing hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food can also help prevent hepatitis A, as well as not sharing drug paraphernalia, the best way to prevent hepatitis A is by getting the vaccine. Call your doctor or local health department to learn how to get vaccinated.

DHS has created a fact sheet, [“Hepatitis A: Just the Facts.”](#) with information on preventing hepatitis A, its signs and symptoms, and who is at highest risk of getting the disease.