

A Southeast Michigan **outbreak of Hepatitis A** has progressively been spreading to more areas, **including Genesee County**. The outbreak started in August, 2016 with the total number of confirmed cases nearing 600 and associated with at least 20 deaths to date.

There have been 8 cases of **Hepatitis A cases identified in Genesee County** with 7 being within the last 3 months; 7 of the 8 cases directly link to the outbreak. The outbreak likely will continue to spread. Prevention is the key to personal and family health.

Hepatitis A, a virus, is **a vaccine-preventable disease** affecting the liver and most commonly **spread** from one person to another **by the fecal-oral route** (meaning a person touching something that has been contaminated with the feces of an infected person).

Symptoms of Hepatitis A infection may include any one or more of the following and occur about 2-6 weeks of being exposed; although, most commonly within the first month following exposure:

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- Sudden abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Yellowing of the whites of the eye or skin

The **most effective preventive measures** one can undertake is through **vaccination** (a 2-shot series) and proper hygiene, which includes thorough and **frequent handwashing**. Vaccination is recommended for individuals that fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Those who use either injection or non-injection **illegal drugs**
- Individuals who are **homeless**
- People who are or have been **incarcerated** in correctional facilities during recent months
- Persons **working with high-risk populations**, including first responders and health care providers
- **Males** who are having **sexual relations with other males**
- Those who **prepare food for others**, such as food service employees and restaurant workers
- Individuals who have **close contact, care for, or live with someone** who has **Hepatitis A**
- People with **chronic liver disease**, such as cirrhosis, Hepatitis B, or Hepatitis C
- Those who have **blood-clotting disorders**

Prevention of Hepatitis A is the best means to staying healthy and **vaccination is safe** for all individuals, including those with liver disease and/or weakened immune systems. The **first dose is at least 95% effective** if given before or within 2 weeks after virus exposure. The vaccine is available at local pharmacies, some health care providers, or at local health departments.

Good hand washing is integral to prevention. Wash hands after using the bathroom, before eating or drinking, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating meals. Use your own towels, toothbrushes, and eating utensils and do not share food, drinks, drugs, or smokes with other people. Do not have sex with someone who has Hepatitis A.

Speak to your health care provider about your risks and recommendations regarding vaccination. Seek medical attention if you develop the signs/symptoms of Hepatitis A infection. The **Genesee County Health Department** maintains a **Hepatitis A Hotline [(810) 257-1017]** for anyone with questions or general concerns about Hepatitis A.