



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

1610 NE 150th Street • Shoreline, Washington 98155-7224

Tel: 206-418-5406 • TTY Relay Service: 800-833-6388

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Hepatitis A Outbreak Alert for Correctional Facilities

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.

DOH is recommending all correctional facilities in Washington conduct surveillance for hepatitis A among incarcerated people and staff. Several cases have been in jails, and DOH encourages jails in affected counties to begin vaccinating for hepatitis A at intake.

Hepatitis A virus infects the liver. Typically there are severe gastrointestinal symptoms (dark urine, clay-colored stools) and jaundice (yellowed eyes). Any incarcerated person or staff member with these symptoms should be isolated from the general jail population and get medical care immediately. Notify your local health jurisdiction (www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions) immediately so blood specimens can be collected to test for Hepatitis A virus if needed.

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.

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