

January 5, 2024

From: Kansas Department of Health and Environment – Division of Public Health

To: Healthcare Providers and Local Health Departments

RE: Ongoing Person-to-Person Outbreak of Hepatitis A in Shawnee County

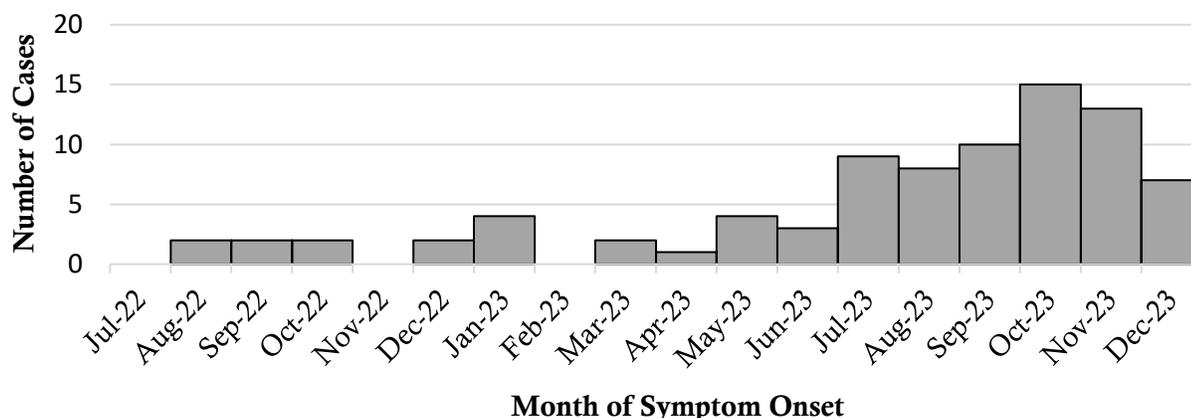
Summary

- 84 cases of acute hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection have been confirmed among Shawnee County residents since July 22, 2022. Most cases have been among persons experiencing homelessness (PEH) and/or persons who use drugs (PWUD). However, recent cases have reported no known risk factors suggesting the possibility of transmission outside of these groups.
- Hepatitis A is a vaccine preventable illness. Early identification of cases, post exposure prophylaxis, and vaccination of at-risk populations are key to preventing and controlling the spread of hepatitis A.
- Increasing hepatitis A vaccination coverage in Shawnee County is necessary to control the current hepatitis A outbreak.
 - Vaccination of PEH and PWUD is recommended in healthcare settings such as emergency departments, federally qualified healthcare centers, and any acute care settings.
 - Vaccination of persons at risk for HAV infection or at risk for severe disease from HAV infection is recommended.

Situation

Shawnee County Health Department and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment are currently responding to an outbreak of hepatitis A in Shawnee County, Kansas. Initially, cases were among people experiencing homelessness and/or persons who use drugs (injection or non-injection). However, this outbreak has evolved and is starting to impact some long-term care facilities, health care staff and patients, and persons reporting no known risk factors.

**Cases of Hepatitis A by Month of Symptom Onset—
July 22, 2022-January 5, 2024
(N = 84)**



Background

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV is found in the stool and blood of people who are infected. Hepatitis A is very contagious. It is spread when someone unknowingly ingests the virus through close personal contact with an infected person or through eating contaminated foods or drinks. Symptoms of hepatitis A can last up to two months and include fatigue, nausea, stomach pain, and jaundice. While death from hepatitis A is rare, it can occur in patients with severely compromised immune systems, those who are older, or those who have a co-existing hepatitis B or hepatitis C infection.

Widespread hepatitis A outbreaks associated with person-to-person transmission have occurred in the U.S. since 2016. Cases have occurred almost exclusively among adults, and HAV transmission has been driven primarily by close contact among PEH and PWUD. These individuals often seek care in acute hospital settings, such as emergency departments; therefore, health care providers play a critical role in vaccination to prevent disease.

Provider Actions Requested

1. Test patients for IgM anti-HAV if they report signs or symptoms of [hepatitis A](#) including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, anorexia, fever, malaise, dark urine, light-colored stool, or abdominal pain and jaundice or elevated liver function tests.
 - Consider and diagnose HAV infection in individuals, especially PEH and PWUD with discrete symptom onset.
 - A complete serology panel with testing for hepatitis A, B and C is recommended in symptomatic patients.
 - HIV testing is also recommended for those with an undocumented HIV status.

2. If a person has been in contact with a person with HAV and is exhibiting any of the symptoms listed above, consider screening for HAV with IgM antibody testing.
3. Asymptomatic patients with elevated liver enzymes, a total bilirubin >3.0 mg/dL or serum alanine aminotransferase (ALT) levels > 200 IU/L, should be considered for IgM anti-HAV testing.
4. Provide post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for close contacts of confirmed hepatitis A cases. Susceptible people exposed to HAV should receive a dose of single-antigen HAV vaccine or intramuscular (IM) immune globulin (IG) (0.1 mL/kg), or both, as soon as possible within 2 weeks of last exposure. The efficacy of combined HAV/HBV vaccine for PEP has not been evaluated, so it is not recommended for PEP.
5. The [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices](#) recommends hepatitis A vaccination for children aged 12-23 months, unvaccinated children and adolescents aged 2-18 years, persons at an increased risk of infection or severe disease, pregnant women at risk for infection or severe disease, or any person who requests vaccination. The vaccine series usually consists of two shots, given six months apart and has been licensed in the United States for use in people one year and older. One dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine has been shown to control outbreaks of hepatitis A – and provides up to [95% seroprotection](#) in healthy adults.
6. Due to the current hepatitis A outbreak in Shawnee County, strongly consider vaccinating the following:
 - People who use injection or non-injection drugs.
 - People experiencing unstable housing and/or homelessness.
 - People who are currently or have recently been incarcerated.
 - People at increased risk of severe disease from infection (persons with severely compromised immune systems, chronic liver disease, or HIV infection and older adults).
 - People who provide care for individuals who are experiencing homelessness, who use injection or non-injection drugs, or the elderly.
7. Pre-vaccination and post-vaccination serologic testing are not required to administer hepatitis A vaccine. **Vaccinations should not be postponed if** vaccination history cannot be obtained or if records are unavailable.
8. Hepatitis A is a [reportable condition](#). Report all suspected and confirmed cases of hepatitis A (IgM positive results only) within 24 hours to the 24/7 KDHE Epidemiology Hotline at 877-427-7317.
9. For reporting, testing, or vaccination guidance, contact the KDHE Epidemiology Hotline at 877-427-7317 or kdhe.epihotline@ks.gov.
10. The Kansas Immunization Program can supply 317 hepatitis A vaccine to providers to vaccinate at risk persons in response to this outbreak. If interested, please contact the Kansas Immunization Program at 877-296-0464.

Resources

[Hepatitis A Vaccination: Information for Healthcare Providers](#)