



To: CAHAN San Diego Participants

Date: May 16, 2023

From: Public Health Services

Health Advisory Update #1: Increased Hepatitis A Cases Associated with Homelessness, Drug Use in San Diego County

Key Messages

- Twenty-eight cases of acute hepatitis A virus (HAV) infections have been confirmed in San Diego County residents since the beginning of 2023. The majority were persons experiencing homelessness (PEH) and illicit drug users.
- Early identification of cases, post exposure prophylaxis, and vaccination of at-risk populations are the keys to prevention of hepatitis A.
- Vaccination of PEH is recommended in settings such as emergency departments, federally qualified healthcare centers and any acute care settings.
- Report all suspect and confirmed HAV cases to the Epidemiology Unit by faxing a Confidential Morbidity Report, or by calling 619-692-8499 (Monday-Friday 8 AM-5 PM), or 858-565-5255 (after hours).

Situation

Twenty-eight acute hepatitis A virus (HAV) infections have been confirmed in San Diego County residents with symptom onset between January 10, 2023, and May 4, 2023. Ages of the cases ranged from 29–67 years (median=45). Twenty-two cases (79%) have been hospitalized and one death has occurred. Eighteen of the 28 cases (64%) are persons experiencing homelessness (PEH), and 14 cases (50%) reported illicit drug use. Only 4 (14%) patients reported travel outside of the county. No common food, beverage, or drug sources have yet been identified. Case investigations are ongoing and epidemiologic curve and case numbers are updated weekly on the County of San Diego's [website](#).

Background

Currently, there are five states with ongoing person-to-person HAV outbreaks. The most recent hepatitis A outbreak involving San Diego County residents occurred in 2022 and was associated with [organic strawberry consumption](#). A large [hepatitis A outbreak occurred in 2016-2018](#) among PEH and persons using illicit drugs. There were 592 confirmed or probable outbreak related HAV cases, including 20 deaths. The strain associated with this prior outbreak is different than the current increased cases being seen.

Actions Requested

1. **Diagnose** HAV infection in individuals, especially the homeless and those who use illicit drugs, with discrete onset of symptoms (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, anorexia, fever, malaise, dark urine, light-colored stool, or abdominal pain), and jaundice or elevated liver function tests.
2. **Report** all suspect and confirmed HAV cases to the Epidemiology Unit by faxing a [Confidential Morbidity Report](#), or by calling 619-692-8499 (Monday-Friday 8 AM-5 PM), or 858-565-5255 (after hours, during weekends, and on County-observed holidays).

- a. Since PEH are at risk for loss of follow-up, providers are urged to contact the Epidemiology Program while suspected cases are still at the healthcare facility.
3. **Vaccinate** all persons with [an indication for HAV vaccine](#), with a focus on PEH and those with illicit drug use. Many of these individuals often seek care in acute hospital settings, such as emergency departments, therefore, healthcare systems play a critical role in vaccination to prevent disease.
 - a. The combined HAV/ Hepatitis B virus (HBV) vaccine may be used in this group if the individual is not already immune to HBV.
 - b. Providers who do not have available vaccine may direct patients to an immunization clinic at the nearest County Public Health Center.
4. **Provide** post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for close contacts of confirmed HAV 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. Detailed information on PEP may be found on the CDPH [Hepatitis A Post-Exposure Prophylaxis Guidance Quicksheet](#).

Resources

- [Hepatitis A - Information & Guidelines | CDC](#)
- [Hepatitis A Q&As for Health Professionals | CDC](#)
- [What is Hepatitis A - FAQ For the Public | CDC](#)
- [Hepatitis A Vaccine Information Statement | Immunize.org](#)
- [Hepatitis A | CDPH](#)
- [Hepatitis A 2023 | San Diego County](#)

Thank you for your participation.

CAHAN San Diego

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