

# Communicable Disease Branch

## 2017 Program Alert # 9

“Multi-state outbreak of hepatitis A among persons who are homeless, persons who use drugs, and MSM”

Date: November 2, 2017



To: North Carolina Communicable Disease Nurses and Local Health Directors

From: North Carolina Communicable Disease Branch

This program alert provides guidance to local health departments regarding the investigation of hepatitis A virus (HAV) infections.

### Background:

Multiple states are investigating outbreaks of hepatitis A that have occurred primarily in persons who are homeless, persons who use drugs, men who have sex with men (MSM) and their close, direct contacts. Since July 2016, nearly 1200 cases have been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including 826 hospitalizations and 37 deaths. The mode of transmission in these outbreaks is suspected to be person-to-person; no common source has been identified.

No cases in these risk groups have been identified in North Carolina in 2017; however, local health departments should screen for homelessness, substance abuse, and MSM status when investigating suspected cases of hepatitis A.

### Case Investigation:

Suspected cases of hepatitis A should be reported to the North Carolina Communicable Disease Branch (CDB) on-call epidemiologist at 919-733-3419. When investigating suspected cases of hepatitis A:

- Identify discrete symptom onset for nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, fatigue, and jaundice
- Review AST and ALT results to verify presence of elevated liver enzymes
- Verify that the patient has been appropriately tested (HAV IgM serology)
- Inquire if the patient is a food handler or works in a healthcare or daycare facility
- Identify risk factors such as homelessness, use of injection or non-injection illegal drugs, and MSM status

### Laboratory Testing:

CDB requests that serologic specimens collected from persons with confirmed hepatitis A who have a history of homelessness, injection or non-injection illegal drug use, or MSM status be sent to the North Carolina State Laboratory of Public Health (SLPH) for submission to CDC. Ideal specimens should be collected within four weeks of symptoms onset. Please notify the CDB on call epidemiologist (919-733-3419) of specimens that meet these criteria.

### Vaccination:

- Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for homeless individuals, persons who use injection and non-injection drugs and MSM.
- Jurisdictions may consider hepatitis A vaccination for persons with ongoing, close contact with homeless persons or persons who use injection and non-injection drugs

Any uninsured adult who meets one or more of the recommended coverage groups can receive a three-dose series of the combination Hep A/Hep B vaccine at a local health department, federally-qualified health center, or rural health clinic. Recommended coverage groups can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/havfaq.htm#B1>

Additional information on hepatitis A can be found on the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm>

Please contact the Communicable Disease Branch on-call number (919-733-3419) with any questions