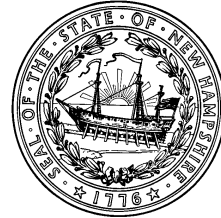


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Hepatitis A Outbreak in New Hampshire Accelerating

Concord, NH – The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services’ (DHHS) Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) has announced that there has been a significant increase in the number of people in New Hampshire diagnosed with hepatitis A. The rate at which cases are being reported are concerning; 33 hepatitis A diagnoses were made in March alone. Since November 2018, 79 people have been diagnosed with hepatitis A, compared to an average of 6 – 7 people annually in recent years. The hepatitis A cases diagnosed since November have occurred in the counties of Hillsborough (36), Strafford (17), Rockingham (10), Merrimack (10), Cheshire (2), Grafton (2), Sullivan (1) and Carroll (1) Counties. One person from Merrimack County has died.

“Hepatitis A is spread by unknowingly getting the virus in your mouth after touching or eating items that are contaminated with small amounts of stool from an infected person. Hepatitis A can also spread from close personal contact with an infected person or caring for someone who is ill,” said Beth Daly, Chief of the Bureau of Infectious Disease Control. “Hepatitis A is preventable with a safe and effective vaccine, which is vital to stopping this outbreak. People at high risk for infection should talk with their healthcare provider about getting vaccinated.”

The virus that causes hepatitis A is contagious and anyone can get it; however, people at highest risk of contracting the virus are:

- people with direct contact with someone with hepatitis A
- people using injection or non-injection recreational drugs, including marijuana
- people experiencing homelessness or with unstable housing (e.g. “couch surfing”)
- gay and bisexual men
- people with ongoing, close contact with high-risk individuals

Hepatitis A causes inflammation of the liver; severe infections can result in liver failure and even death. Symptoms include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A.

Eighteen states have declared an outbreak of hepatitis A. More than 15,000 cases and 140 deaths have been reported in the US. For more information on New Hampshire’s outbreak, visit www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/hepatitisa/hepa-nh.htm.

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