



Department of Health

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Executive Deputy Commissioner

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Dear Colleague:

A recent increase in hepatitis A infections in men who have sex with men (MSM) has been reported by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYCDOHMH).ⁱ The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has documented a similar risk profile among individuals with hepatitis A who reside in NYS outside of NYC.ⁱⁱ Multiple countries in Western Europe are also experiencing outbreaks of hepatitis A among MSM.ⁱⁱⁱ

The purpose of this letter is to request that efforts be intensified to implement existing recommendations for completion of a hepatitis A vaccine series in all men and transgender individuals who have sex with men who are either not previously immunized or who do not know their vaccination or disease status. Information for consumers about hepatitis A accompanies this letter. Additional information as well as posters and brochures to assist in your efforts to educate individuals about the need for vaccine are available from the NYSDOH and CDC websites.^{iv}

Since 2006, children have been routinely vaccinated in New York State against hepatitis A. In the United States, hepatitis A vaccine is currently recommended for the following adults and adolescents who have not been previously vaccinated:

- men who have sex with men,
- travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common,
- users of recreational drugs, whether injected or not,
- people with chronic liver disease such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C,
- people with clotting-factor disorders,
- people who work with hepatitis A-infected animals or in a hepatitis A research laboratory, or
- people who anticipate close personal contact with an international adoptee from a country where hepatitis A is common.

The hepatitis A vaccine is given as two intramuscular injections, six months apart. The hepatitis A vaccine also comes in a combination form, containing both hepatitis A and B vaccine, that can be given to persons 18 years or older. This form is given as three intramuscular injections, over a period of six months, or as three shots over one month and a booster shot at 12 months. This combination vaccine is an option if the single formulation of hepatitis A vaccine is not available, or if individuals want vaccination against both hepatitis A and B. Hepatitis B vaccine is also recommended for MSM.

The current increase in cases of hepatitis A in MSM in New York underscores the need to discuss appropriate behavior-based screenings and prevention measures. Along with the hepatitis A vaccination, those MSM at risk for hepatitis A as the result of sexual activity would also merit screening for sexually-transmitted infections, HIV and hepatitis C and should be considered for HIV prevention with pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medication.

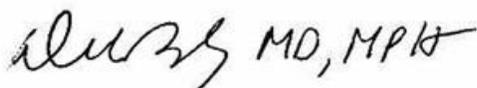
Hepatitis A vaccine costs and administration are reimbursable through the New York State Medicaid program, AIDS Drug Assistance Program and most commercial insurance programs for their respective enrollees.

Health care providers are required to report suspect and confirmed cases of hepatitis A to the local health department where the patient resides, under the New York State Sanitary Code (10NYCRR 2.10). It is essential to evaluate the occupation of any suspected cases, as suspected cases occurring in a food handler must be reported immediately by telephone.

Post-exposure prophylaxis should be offered to all previously unvaccinated persons who are or have been in close contact with a person who has hepatitis A, including household members, sex partners, and persons who have shared illicit drugs with an infected patient. These individuals should be administered a single dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine or intramuscular immune globulin (IG) as soon as possible, within 2 weeks after exposure.

For questions about hepatitis A reporting or post-exposure prophylaxis, please contact your local health department or the NYSDOH Bureau of Communicable Disease Control via e-mail at bcdc@health.ny.gov or by phone at (518) 473-4439. New York City residents with laboratory-confirmed hepatitis A infection should be reported to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene by telephone 866-NYC-DOH1 (1-866-692-3641) or via NYCMED at <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/reporting-and-services/nyc-med.page>.

Sincerely yours,



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Johanne E. Morne, MS
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ⁱ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. **2017 DOHMH Alert #34: UPDATE: Increase in Cases of Hepatitis A among Men Who Have Sex with Men**
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/han/alert/alert34-hepatitis-a-among-men.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Latash J, Dorsinville M, Del Rosso P, et al. **Notes from the Field: Increase in Reported Hepatitis A Infections Among Men Who Have Sex with Men — New York City, January–August 2017**. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2017;66:999–1000. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6637a7> .

ⁱⁱⁱ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. **Rapid risk assessment: hepatitis A outbreak in the EU/EEA mostly affecting men who have sex with men. Third update, June 28, 2017**. Solna, Sweden: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; 2017. <https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/rapid-risk-assessment-hepatitis-outbreak-eueea-mostly-affecting-men-who-have-sex> .

^{iv} **New York State Department of Health:**

--Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health:

<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/consumers/lgbt/>

--Fact Sheet on Hepatitis A: <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1859/>

--Information for Consumers – Hepatitis A:

https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/hepatitis/hepatitis_a/consumer.htm

--Information for Providers – Hepatitis A:

https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/hepatitis/hepatitis_a/provider.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

-- Hepatitis Fact Sheet for Gay and Bisexual Men:

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/patienteduhav.htm>

--Hepatitis A Questions and Answers for the Public:

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/afaq.htm>

--Patient Education Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/patienteduhav.htm>

--Hepatitis A Questions and Answers for Health Professionals:

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/havfaq.htm>

Other Resource:

--Vaccine Information Statements: http://www.immunize.org/vis/vis_hepatitis_a.asp

Increase in Hepatitis A Among Men who Have Sex with Men: Six Things to Know for People with Sex Partners who are Gay or Bisexual Men*

1. Hepatitis A is passed when feces (poop or stool) from a person with hepatitis A infection gets into the mouth of another person. This can happen when a person puts their mouth, lips or tongue on another person's anus. Hepatitis A can also be passed if a person puts their mouth on a penis, finger, sex toy, condom or any other object that was near or touched the anus or feces of another person. Contact with a very small (microscopic) amount of feces can pass the virus. Hepatitis A can also be passed through eating food that was in contact with the hepatitis A virus. This can happen if the hands of the person who prepared or handled the food had contact with feces containing the virus and were not washed properly before preparing or handling the food.
2. Since January 1, 2017, there has been a ten-times increase of reported cases of hepatitis A among men who have sex with men (MSM) in New York City (NYC). There have also been outbreaks of hepatitis A in 16 European countries, and there may be a link between these people and the people in NYC. Cases of hepatitis A among MSM have also been seen in New York State outside of NYC.
3. The symptoms of hepatitis A include: fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, dark urine, yellow skin or eyes or grey-colored stools. These symptoms generally appear 2 to 6 weeks after being exposed to hepatitis A. Symptoms can last for up to six months. Many people with hepatitis A do not have symptoms. Almost everyone recovers fully from hepatitis A but the infection can be life-threatening in a very small number of cases. There is no treatment for hepatitis A, except for medications to help the specific symptoms a person might have. For example, medicine may be given for nausea, vomiting or fever.
4. You can avoid getting hepatitis A by getting vaccinated:
 - It is recommended that all people who have sex with gay or bisexual men be vaccinated for hepatitis A. Hepatitis A vaccine is sometimes given in a combination that includes both the hepatitis A and B vaccines. Depending on the vaccine, you may need 2 or 3 shots over time to be fully protected.
 - If you had sex, shared drugs or lived with someone who has hepatitis A within the past two weeks, contact your health care provider right away about getting the hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin, which can help protect you.
 - You may have already been vaccinated against hepatitis A. If you are not sure, there is no harm in repeating the vaccination. It can be helpful to check with your health care provider about your vaccination history.
5. You can get hepatitis A vaccination from:
 - Your health care provider or any health center
 - NYC Immunization Clinics or Sexual Health Clinics: Call 311 for location information.
 - Local health department immunization clinic: Call your local health department.
6. Private insurance and Medicaid will pay for the hepatitis A vaccine but you may have a co-pay. Immunization and sexual health clinics may offer low or no cost vaccination.

* People who are transgender or gender non-conforming may be at risk for hepatitis A if they have contact with MSM and are exposed to the virus in any of the ways that hepatitis A can be passed.
