



Infectious Disease Epidemiology Report

Hepatitis A in Maine, 2008



Background

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. Poor hand washing by infected persons increases the risk of transmission. The virus spreads more easily in areas where sanitary conditions and personal hygiene practices are poor. Most infections result from exposure during international travel or contact with a household member or sex partner who has hepatitis A. Men who have sex with men are at higher risk. Washing hands after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing or eating food can help prevent infection. Casual contact, as in the usual office, factory, or school setting, does not usually spread the virus.

Methods

Hepatitis A infections in Maine are reportable immediately upon recognition or strong suspicion of disease. Symptoms of acute hepatitis A include: tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice) or elevated serum aminotransferase (AST) levels. Acute HAV is defined as: IgM anti-HAV positive serology accompanied by a discrete onset of symptoms and elevated liver enzymes or jaundice.

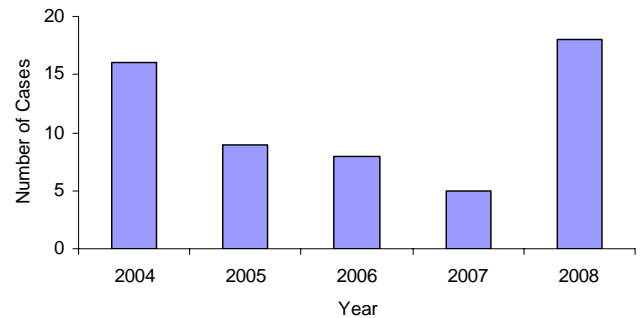
Reported cases are investigated by Field Epidemiologists to determine the exposure, case contacts and to make recommendations for prophylaxis and/or follow-up testing for vaccination and education for the contacts or the person themselves. Confirmed cases are reported to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) via the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NEDSS).

Results

There were eighteen cases of hepatitis A in Maine in 2008. Ten of the eighteen were females.

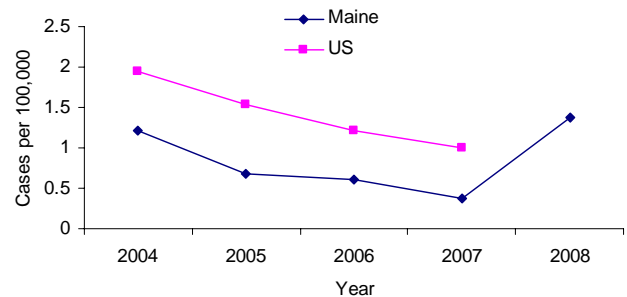
The median age was twelve years old and ages ranged from 2 to 82 years old. In 2008 the number of HAV cases reported in Maine was more than three times the number reported in 2007 and the most reported in Maine in more than five years. (Fig. 1) The increase was related to an outbreak of 13 cases involving an asymptomatic foreign born child, multiple family members and school contacts.

Fig. 1 Hepatitis A Case, Maine 2004-2008



The case rate for Maine, although lower than the U.S. case rate has mirrored the U.S. trend in recent years. (Fig. 2)

Fig. 2 Hepatitis A by Year—Maine and U.S., 2004-2008



Discussion

Fischer, et. al. reported a multi-state retrospective study of hepatitis A in contacts of adoptees in Clinical Infectious Disease, May 2008.¹ The study identified 27 cases of hepatitis A among international adoptees (5 persons), their contacts (20 persons) and unvaccinated travelers to the

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adoptees' countries (2 persons). Most of the cases occurred in contacts that had not traveled. They concluded that hepatitis A vaccination guidelines should include family and at-risk contacts of adoptees that didn't travel.

In 2009 new recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) are expected to address vaccinating close contacts and families adopting foreign born children.

Summary

Infection with the hepatitis A virus is preventable. The practice of good hygiene and particularly good hand washing go far to limit the transmission of the virus. Hepatitis A vaccine is effective and is recommended for all children 12-23 months of age. Vaccine is also recommended for anyone at risk for contracting hepatitis A whether the exposure is from work, travel, risky behavior or close contact with someone who has hepatitis A. Hepatitis A Immune Globulin (IG) is also recommended for post exposure prophylaxis in some circumstances.

Hepatitis A is a category 1 reportable disease in Maine. Suspect and/or laboratory confirmed cases need to be reported immediately by calling the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (MeCDC) at 800 821-5821. Timely reporting is essential for recommending treatment for contacts and controlling the spread of the disease.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center, or contact the Maine CDC, Infectious Disease Epidemiology program by calling 1-800-821-5821 or the Maine Immunization Program 1-800-867-4775, or visit the Maine CDC website www.mainepublichealth.gov. The federal CDC website - www.cdc.gov – is another excellent source of health information.

References

1. Fischer G, Teshale E, Miller C, et al, Hepatitis A among International Adoptees and Their Contacts, Brief Report, CID 2008;47 (15 Sept): 812-814
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Surveillance for Acute Viral Hepatitis-United States, 2006. MMWR 2008; 57(No. SS-2):1-28.

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Final 2007 Reports of Nationally Notifiable Infectious Diseases. MMWR 2008; 57(No. 33): 901-913.