

MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



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****ADVISORY – Important Information****

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TO: All Epidemiologists, HETL, HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis Staff, Local Public Health Liaisons, City and County Health Departments, Tribal Health Centers, FQHCs, Infection Control Practitioners, Physician Practices, Hospital Contacts, Lab Facilities, County EMA Directors, Maine Medical Association, Northern New England Poison Center, Local Health Officers, Public Health - Required, Public Health Nursing, EMS, RRCs

FROM: Dr. Sheila Pinette, Director - Maine CDC
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SUBJECT: **Hepatitis A Virus Cluster, Northern Lincoln County, August 2011**

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Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)
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Hepatitis A Virus Cluster, Northern Lincoln County, August 2011

Background: The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) is investigating a cluster of acute hepatitis A virus infections in Northern Lincoln County. Currently, 2 suspect and 3 confirmed cases have been identified. The first identified infected person had a history of recent international travel. The other four ill individuals were close contacts of the first case-patient.

Hepatitis A is an uncommon disease in Maine. An average of 10 cases are reported in Maine each year. Illness caused by hepatitis A virus typically has an abrupt onset and can include fever, malaise, anorexia, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine and jaundice. The likelihood of having symptoms with hepatitis A infection is related to age. Hepatitis A can result in mild illness in children, and many will be asymptomatic. Among older children and adults, infection typically is symptomatic, and can range in severity from mild to life-threatening. Case fatality can reach 1.8% in adults aged 50 years and older. The average incubation period for hepatitis A is 28 days (range: 15-50 days). Individuals are considered infectious from 2 weeks before until 1 week after the onset of jaundice. The infectious periods for the persons in the Northern Lincoln County cluster range from early July to mid August. The virus is excreted in feces and is transmitted by the fecal-oral route or through the consumption of contaminated food or water. Good hand washing is key to limiting disease transmission.

Diagnostic testing should include hepatitis A IgG and IgM antibody and liver enzymes (AST/ALT). Interpretation of a positive IgM test for HAV is difficult in a recently immunized individual. IgM positive results can occur from either natural infection or immunization. Confirmation of infection in recently immunized individuals is usually dependent on clinical signs and elevated liver enzymes.

Susceptible persons exposed to hepatitis A may benefit from postexposure prophylaxis within 14 days of their most recent exposure. For healthy persons aged 12 months to 40 years, postexposure prophylaxis consists of a single dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine. The combination hepatitis A/hepatitis B vaccine (Twinrix) should not be used for postexposure prophylaxis. For persons under 12 months, over 40 years, or persons of any age with chronic liver disease, postexposure prophylaxis consists of immune globulin (IG).

Recommendations:

- Area health care providers are encouraged to consider hepatitis A virus infection in persons with clinically compatible illness (abrupt onset of symptoms that may include fever, malaise, anorexia, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine and jaundice).
- For suspected cases, obtain serum hepatitis A IgG and IgM and liver enzymes.
- All cases of suspected viral hepatitis should be reported immediately by phone to the Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821. Epidemiologists are available to provide guidance on post-exposure prophylaxis with either single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin.

Administer routine hepatitis A vaccine to all children at one year of age, as well as to persons at increased risk for hepatitis A virus infection.

For More Information:

- General information on hepatitis A virus can be found on the Maine CDC website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov> or the federal CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov>.
- Information on the prevention of hepatitis A after exposure is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5641.pdf>.