



April 19, 2019

Dear Healthcare Provider:

Georgia is currently experiencing a large hepatitis A (HAV) outbreak. Since June 1, 2018, the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) has identified over 250 infections statewide - more than nine times higher than the total of 24 infections identified in 2017. The HAV outbreak in Georgia mirrors the large outbreaks that have been occurring in other states, primarily among people who use drugs and people experiencing homelessness.

In Georgia, 69% of the identified HAV cases have been hospitalized, 32% were associated with injection drug use, 39% were associated with non-injection illicit drug use, 13% have been among men who have sex with men (MSM), and 24% were among close contacts of a confirmed hepatitis A case. We are also beginning to see increases in HAV infections among food handlers.

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable disease. The best protection against HAV infections and outbreaks is through widespread vaccination, particularly among the populations most at risk: injection and non-injection drug users, homeless persons, MSM, people incarcerated or who were recently incarcerated, and people with chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Vaccination should not be postponed if a vaccination history cannot be obtained.

#### **Action Steps for Healthcare Providers**

1. Screen patients for risk factors.
2. Recommend and administer hepatitis A vaccine to at-risk patients, regardless of the original presenting complaint or the type of clinical facility.
3. Record immunizations in the Georgia Registry for Immunization Transactions and Services (GRITS).
4. Consider hepatitis A as a diagnosis in anyone with jaundice or clinically compatible symptoms; serologic testing for HAV is available through commercial laboratories.
5. Immediately report patients diagnosed with hepatitis A to your local health department or by calling 1-866-PUB-HLTH to ensure timely case investigation and follow-up of contacts.

Thank you for all that you do, and for your commitment to keeping Georgians healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner & State Health Officer

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