



April 2019

Dear Restaurant Owner/Operator:

Georgia is currently experiencing a large hepatitis A (HAV) outbreak, a highly-contagious, vaccine-preventable liver infection. Hepatitis A usually spreads when a person unknowingly ingests the virus from objects, food or drinks contaminated by small, undetected amounts of stool from an infected person.

Hepatitis A can be spread when restaurant workers infected with HAV don't wash their hands after using the bathroom. Patrons who eat the food they prepare may unknowingly be infected with HAV. **Restaurant employees should wash their hands with soap and water after using the bathroom and between tasks to help stop the spread of hepatitis A. Employees who work in the kitchen must wash their hands after using the restroom when they re-enter the kitchen. Do not touch ready-to-eat food with bare hands.**

**We have created a [downloadable poster](#) for employee education about HAV prevention. We encourage you to display it in your kitchen and other areas visible to employees.**

Since June 2018, the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) has identified hundreds of acute hepatitis A virus infections statewide, and the numbers continue to increase. This mirrors the large HAV outbreaks that have been occurring in other states among injection and non-injection drug users, homeless populations and men who have sex with men.

HAV is vaccine preventable. **The best way to prevent HAV infection is by being vaccinated against the hepatitis A virus.** Most health insurance plans cover vaccination for hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A symptoms include yellow skin or eyes (jaundice), joint pain, fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, diarrhea and clay-colored stools. They range from mild to severe and last a few weeks to several months. A health care provider can determine if an individual has hepatitis A by discussing symptoms and taking a blood sample.

The Georgia Department of Public Health's Food Service Rules and Regulations, Chapter 511-6-1 require each person in charge (PIC) at a food service establishment to have a working knowledge of five specific symptoms: vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice, sore throat with fever, and an infected wound or boil. The PIC should also have knowledge of these six reportable diseases: hepatitis A, typhoid fever caused by *Salmonella typhi*, Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC), norovirus, *Shigella* and non-typhoidal *Salmonella*. The PIC is also required to train food service employees on the requirement to report these symptoms and diseases or exposure to these diseases. For more information on specific actions required, log on to <https://dph.georgia.gov/food-service-rules-and-documents>.

We appreciate your commitment to keeping Georgians healthy by advocating handwashing and vaccination among your employees. Together, we can help slow the spread of HAV in Georgia.

Sincerely,

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