



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Tucson, AZ 85714
520-724-7797

December 14, 2018

Dear Healthcare Provider:

RE: Sharp Increase in Confirmed Hepatitis A Infections Among High-Risk Populations

The Pima County Health Department is currently conducting an epidemiologic investigation of an outbreak of hepatitis A cases that are disproportionately affecting homeless and illicit drug-users in Pima County. We are asking for your help in stopping the spread of this highly contagious infectious disease in our community.

Seven acute hepatitis A virus (HAV) infections have been confirmed in Pima County residents with symptom onset between 11/15/2018 and 12/20/2018. Six of the seven (86%) cases have been hospitalized and there have been no associated deaths reported. The age range of confirmed HAV cases was from 21 to 62 years (median = 40 years).

Recommendations for Providers

- Consider HAV infection, especially for individuals who report homelessness and/or illicit drug use, with discrete onset of symptoms (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, anorexia, fever, malaise, dark urine, light-colored stool, or abdominal pain), and jaundice or elevated liver function tests.
- Whenever possible, report all suspect and confirmed HAV cases while the individual is still at your facility. This action will ensure that a disease investigator from the health department can interview the patient by phone for a risk history and will facilitate serum or stool specimen submission to the Arizona State Public Health Laboratory for possible genotyping. **To report a suspect or confirmed case, call (520) 724-7797 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**
- Provide post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for close contacts of confirmed HAV cases. Susceptible people exposed to HAV should receive a dose of single-antigen HAV vaccine or intramuscular (IM) immune globulin (IG) (0.1 mL/kg), or both, as soon as possible within 2 weeks of last exposure. The efficacy of combined HAV/Hepatitis B virus (HBV) vaccine for PEP has not been evaluated, so it is not recommended for PEP. Detailed information on PEP may be found on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov and searching "Hepatitis A PEP" or by calling the Pima County Health Department (PCHD).
- Provide HAV vaccine to homeless individuals and illicit drug users who are not already immunized. The combined HAV/HBV vaccine may be used in this group if the individual is not already immune to HBV. Providers who do not have available vaccine may direct patients to the nearest PCHD Public Health Clinic. Homeless individuals and illicit drug users are also at higher risk for other vaccine preventable diseases and should be brought up-to-date per the relevant CDC immunization schedule. The CDC encourages vaccination in emergency departments and correction facilities when feasible.

Background

In the U.S., person-to-person transmission through the fecal-oral route is the primary means of HAV transmission. Most infections result from close personal contact with an infected household member or sexual partner. Common-source outbreaks and sporadic cases can also occur from exposure to fecally contaminated food or water.

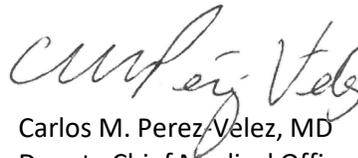
HAV outbreaks have been reported among the homeless, who have an increased risk of infection due to living conditions when compared with the general population. This increased risk due to homelessness has been demonstrated to be independent of other known risk factors, such as injection of illicit drugs and sexual practices. Morbidity and mortality have been reported to be higher in HAV outbreaks involving the homeless and illicit drug users.

If you have questions about Hepatitis A or this investigation, please do not hesitate to contact the Health Department Epidemiology Program at the phone number provided above. Our staff is ready and eager to support healthcare providers as we work together to prevent the further spread of HAV infection within this highly vulnerable population. We thank you for your ongoing partnership and cooperation.

Sincerely,



Marcy Flanagan, DBA, MA
Department Director



Carlos M. Perez Velez, MD
Deputy Chief Medical Officer