



****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

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Hepatitis A Continues to Increase in Hamilton County: Hepatitis A is Vaccine-Preventable

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN – The number of hepatitis A cases in Hamilton County continues to rise and is currently at seven since early May 2018. Normally we have about 0-1 cases per year. The most effective means of preventing hepatitis A infection is by getting the hepatitis A vaccine. Other preventive measures include good handwashing practice and avoiding recreational drug use (illicit drugs, whether intravenous or non-intravenous).

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable, communicable disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). It is usually transmitted person-to-person through the fecal-oral route or consumption of contaminated food or water. It is a self-limiting disease, meaning the virus does not remain in the body as a chronic infection. Most adults will have symptoms, such as fever, fatigue, low appetite, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, dark urine, clay-colored stools, joint pain, and jaundice, that usually resolve within 2 months of infection. Most children under 6 years of age do not have symptoms or may have an unrecognized infection. Although many adults will have mild symptoms, some will result in hospitalization or even death. The best way to prevent hepatitis A infection is to get vaccinated.

“At this time, the Health Department is working to prevent the spread of the disease in our community,” says Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department Health Officer Dr. Valerie Boaz, “We are focusing on certain risk factor groups and encouraging them to come in and get the vaccine for free.”

The high risk factor groups are men who have sex with men, those who use recreational or illicit drugs, and those who are homeless or transient. However, anyone can get the disease. People in these high-risk groups may get the vaccine for free on a walk-in basis at any of our [five clinics](#). If someone has had direct contact with persons who have hepatitis A, they are urged to contact the Health Department’s Epidemiology section at (423) 209-8190.

The hepatitis A vaccine was created in 1995 and required for kindergarten beginning in 2011. It is a two-dose series. One dose can provide protection for several years while getting the second dose may provide a lifetime of protection. Once a person has produced antibodies in response to an HAV infection, they are protected for life. The vaccine is safe for pregnant women when indicated, although they should first consult their primary care provider for guidance.

The Health Department is working with local restaurants to make sure they are aware of this current hepatitis A situation. Cooking food to >185°F for 1 minute will kill the virus, however, the virus can still be spread from food that is contaminated after cooking. All food handlers, whether commercial or domestic, should wash their hands before and frequently when preparing food and refrain from working if they become infected with HAV. Adequate chlorination of water kills any HAV that may enter the municipal water supply.

The Health Department is also planning vaccination and educational outreach through several community partners that have contact with the high-risk groups, such as treatment centers, missions, and homeless camps.

For more information, please follow us on Facebook and Twitter, visit our [hepatitis A website](#), or call our Epidemiology section at (423) 209-8190.