



Press Release

Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department

Web: health.hamiltontn.org

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****
August 20, 2018

Medical Reserve Corps Assists with Hepatitis A Outbreak Response

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN – The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department has increased their efforts to lessen the spread of hepatitis A throughout our community. To meet the additional personnel needs, they are drawing on the Medical Reserve Corps.

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) is a national network of volunteers organized locally to reinforce emergency response capabilities. They prepare for and respond to natural disasters, such as wildfires, tornados, floods, and other public health emergencies, such as disease outbreaks.



“Thanks to the MRC, we can reduce interruptions to our regular services,” says Health Department Emergency Response Coordinator Sabrina Novak, “The Medical Reserve Corps is one of our most valuable public health tools.”

At this stage in the local hepatitis A outbreak, the Health Department’s main effort is to protect as many of the high risk individuals as possible. This is being done through vaccination outreach clinics that offer the safe and effective hepatitis A vaccination free to the high-risk groups. Holding these clinics in various locations around Hamilton County takes personnel, such as nurses and clerks. These are staff who are drawn away from regular Health Department services. The MRC volunteers fill this gap by assisting with the outreach clinics.

The evidence from our local hepatitis A outbreak, as well as in Nashville, Middle Tennessee, and other states, such as Kentucky and Ohio, shows that the predominant risk factors are recreational drug use, homelessness, and men who have sex with men. Health Department response efforts have been focused on reaching these groups.

Vaccination outreach clinics have been held at the Health Department’s Homeless Healthcare Clinic, the Hamilton County and Silverdale jails, locations in the substance abuse treatment community, extended stay hotels, and homeless shelters around the area.

“We appreciate the health department calling us up,” says Medical Reserve Corps volunteer Joye Wessells, “It is very fulfilling to know that we are helping make a difference in our community by preventing the spread of hepatitis A.”

The wider Health Department response includes monitoring for new cases, investigating current cases and their contacts, and providing community education about hepatitis A.

If you would like to join the local Medical Reserve Corps, please contact the Health Department’s MRC Volunteer Coordinator, Maegan Kerr at 423-209-8068. There is a need for both medical and non-medical personnel; all skill sets are welcome. More information can be found on their [website](#).