



**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***  
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## **Health Department Reports Increase in Hepatitis A Cases:** Residents Urged to Protect Themselves through Vaccination and Hygiene

Currently, the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department is experiencing a higher than normal number of cases of Hepatitis A Virus (HAV). Typically, about one case a year is reported to the Department, yet since early May 2018, four cases have been reported. In light of the current Hepatitis A outbreak in Middle Tennessee, and other similar outbreaks in several other states, the Health Department wants residents to know actions it is taking to prevent the spread of the disease.

At this point, the specific actions taken by the Health Department are to investigate the current cases, to monitor for new cases, to educate the community on how the disease is spread and how it can be prevented, and to conduct a vaccination program for high risk individuals.

“Hepatitis A is a contagious, vaccine-preventable liver infection,” says Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department Health Officer Dr. Valerie Boaz, “Hepatitis A usually spreads by the fecal-oral route through ingestion of contaminated food or drinks, close person-to-person contact with an infected person, and sexual contact with an infected person.”

The best way to prevent contracting or spreading the disease is to get the Hepatitis A vaccine along with good hand hygiene, such as washing hands with soap and warm water after going to the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before preparing food. Also, avoid using recreational drugs.

Although anyone can get the disease, people most at risk for Hepatitis A infection in this multi-state outbreak include those experiencing homelessness, people who use drugs recreationally, and men who have sex with men. Anyone with these risk factors is eligible to receive free Hepatitis A vaccine at any of our Health Department locations, Monday-Friday, 8AM-4PM. No appointment is necessary.

### Clinic Locations:

- Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department, 921 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Chattanooga TN, 37403, 423-209-8340
- Birchwood Health Center, 5625 Hwy 60, Birchwood TN, 37308, 423-961-0446
- Homeless Health Care Center, 730 East 11th St, Chattanooga TN 37403, 423- 265-5708
- Ooltewah Health Center, 5520 High St, Ooltewah TN, 37363, 423-238-4269
- Sequoyah Health Center, 9527 West Ridge Trail Rd, Soddy Daisy TN, 37379, 423-842-3031

For more information about the disease, you may call the Epidemiology section at 209-8190, or visit [cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav](http://cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav).