



# Jefferson County PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

### Jefferson County Public Health Service Responds to Hepatitis A Outbreak

**Watertown, NY, August 5, 2019** ~ Jefferson County is experiencing a significant increase in Hepatitis A cases. As of today five cases have been confirmed in Jefferson County. In 2018, Jefferson County had two cases for the year. At this time the virus appears to be circulating in the IV drug user population but we continue to look for other potential links between the cases. None of the cases involve food handlers. The Jefferson County Public Health Service (JCPHS) has taken a proactive approach to help mitigate the spread of Hepatitis A.

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. Hepatitis A is a self-limited disease that does not result in chronic infection. Most adults with hepatitis A have symptoms, including fatigue, low appetite, stomach pain, nausea, and jaundice, that usually resolve within 2 months of infection. Antibodies produced in response to hepatitis A infection last for life and protect against reinfection. Vaccination with the full, two-dose series of hepatitis A vaccine is the best way to prevent HAV infection. The HAV is transmitted:

- **Person-to-person transmission through the fecal-oral route** (i.e., ingestion of something that has been contaminated with the feces of an infected person) is the primary means of HAV transmission in the United States. Infections in the United States result primarily from travel to another country where hepatitis A virus transmission is common, close personal contact with infected persons, sex among men who have sex with men, and behaviors associated with injection drug use
- **Exposure to contaminated food or water** can cause common-source outbreaks and sporadic cases of HAV infection. Uncooked foods contaminated with HAV can be a source of outbreaks, as well as cooked foods that are not heated to temperatures capable of killing the virus during preparation (i.e., 185 degrees F [ $>85$  degrees C] for one minute) and foods that are contaminated after cooking, as occurs in outbreaks associated with infected food handlers.

The first case was reported in late June. At that time, JCPHS issued an alert to medical providers to consider Hepatitis A in their patients. Prevention educational materials have been supplied to local substance abuse treatment providers and to behavioral health treatment organizations. These materials include common sense recommendations and precautions to prevent Hepatitis A including:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom. Keep in mind the virus is transmitted through fecal-oral route.
- If you are at risk of Hepatitis A, get vaccinated. At risk people include close personal contact with infected persons, sex among men who have sex with men, and behaviors associated with injection drug use. If you are uninsured, JCPHS offers free vaccine through the Vaccines for Adults program. Many insurances cover the cost. Check with your medical provider.

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