



SAN BENITO COUNTY

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

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PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES
Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Above Average Incidence of Acute Hepatitis A Virus Infections Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
22 September 2017

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SAN BENITO COUNTY, CA. California is experiencing an increase in cases of hepatitis A infection. Currently there are 525 confirmed cases of hepatitis A throughout California and 17 deaths. Outbreaks have been declared in San Diego and Santa Cruz Counties.

Although there are no confirmed cases of hepatitis A in San Benito County, health officials are proactive in conducting prevention and control measures including providing hepatitis A vaccine to at-risk individuals, including homeless persons and/or illicit drug users. “We are using a number of strategies to vaccinate the high-risk population, including sending public health nursing teams directly to homeless encampments. We have also developed and distributed recommendations and educational materials for clinicians and businesses providing services to at-risk populations”, said Dr. Newel, San Benito County Public Health Officer. “We plan to install at least six hand washing stations and portable toilets in locations most accessible for at-risk populations; and are recommending additional cleaning procedures effective at inactivating hepatitis A virus for public toilets.”

The hepatitis A virus can spread through contaminated food or water. The virus can also spread by having sexual contact or sharing drugs with someone who is infected. Those most at risk include: travelers to areas with high or intermediate rates of endemic hepatitis A; men who have sex with men; users of injection and non-injection illegal drugs; persons with clotting factor disorders; and household members or caregivers of persons infected with hepatitis A.

Symptoms of hepatitis A include: jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, and light-colored stools. Symptoms usually appear over a number of days and last less than two months. However, some people can be ill for as long as six months. Hepatitis A can sometimes cause liver failure and even death.

To prevent the spread of hepatitis A infection: get the hepatitis A vaccination; wash your hands frequently, especially after using the bathroom or changing diapers, and before handling food; do not have sex with someone who has a hepatitis A infection; use your own towels, toothbrushes and eating utensils; and don't share food, drinks or smokes with other people. Waterless hand sanitizers are not effective against hepatitis A virus, which is a hardy virus and difficult to inactivate. Therefore, washing hands thoroughly with soap and water is an important prevention and control measure.

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Individuals are recommended to check their hepatitis A vaccination status and talk to their health care providers about the risks for hepatitis A. Persons planning an international trip should check the CDC Travelers' Health website (<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>) to see if hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for the intended destinations.

Hepatitis A vaccine is available at many doctors' offices and clinics and at some retail pharmacies. For persons without health insurance or Medi-Cal, vaccine is available at San Benito County Public Health Services. For additional information please call (831) 637-5367 or go to our website at <http://hhsa.cosb.us/divisions/public-health>.

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