



## **HEALTH ADVISORY #145**

### **Increased Cases of Hepatitis A Among Persons Who Are Homeless and Persons Who Use Illicit Drugs**

**TO: West Virginia Healthcare Providers, Hospitals and other Healthcare Facilities**

**FROM: Rahul Gupta, MD, MPH, MBA, FACP - Commissioner and State Health Officer  
WVDHHR, Bureau for Public Health**

**DATE: April 20, 2018**

**LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITY HEALTH PROVIDERS, HOSPITAL-BASED PHYSICIANS, INFECTION PREVENTIONISTS, LABORATORY DIRECTORS, AND OTHER APPLICABLE PARTNERS

**OTHER RECIPIENTS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO ASSOCIATION MEMBERS, STAFF, ETC.

West Virginia is reporting an increase in hepatitis A virus (HAV) cases in some counties, namely Kanawha and Putnam. Several have been molecularly linked to the multi-state outbreak in which genotype 1B is the HAV strain of concern; other cases have been epidemiologically-linked to cases from Kentucky.

To date, 17 West Virginia cases have been hospitalized at four area hospitals. Cases are highly mobile, and many have been discharged against medical advice making it challenging for public health to follow-up with appropriate surveillance and prevention actions. Coinfections with hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C (HCV) are prevalent. Methamphetamine and illicit drug use generally have been documented in many cases.

Because many states are experiencing large HAV outbreaks, increased demand for vaccine has resulted in restricted distribution. The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health (WVBPH) is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide HAV vaccine to affected counties. Requests for vaccine must go through the Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services, Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology (DIDE). Vaccination campaigns should target contacts of HAV cases, homeless persons, and persons who use illicit drugs.

Healthcare providers who suspect HAV in patients are recommended to:

- Conduct a complete HAV, HBV, and HCV serology panel on symptomatic patients.
- Report suspected cases to the local health department **immediately**.
- Inform patients that someone from the local health department will contact them for follow-up.
- Offer HAV vaccine to persons who are homeless and/or use illicit drugs.
- Retain serum specimens for confirmatory testing and possible molecular testing at the CDC.

The WVBPH is seeking collaboration with various partners including substance use treatment facilities, homeless shelters, harm reduction programs, free clinics, and correctional facilities to disseminate information to high-risk populations. Information about HAV and the current outbreak can be found at: [https://dhr.wv.gov/oeps/disease/viral-hepatitis/pages/hepA\\_outbreak.aspx](https://dhr.wv.gov/oeps/disease/viral-hepatitis/pages/hepA_outbreak.aspx).

For additional information, you can contact DIDE at (304) 558-5358, extension 1; (800) 423-1271, extension 1; or the 24/7 answering service at (304) 925-9946.

This message was directly distributed by the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health to local health departments and professional associations. Receiving entities are responsible for further disseminating the information as appropriate to the target audience.

**Categories of Health Alert messages:**

**Health Alert:** Conveys the highest level of importance. Warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** Provides important information for a specific incident or situation. May not require immediate action.

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