September 17, 2018

Dear Healthcare Provider:

Local health departments from 40 counties and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) continue to investigate an outbreak of hepatitis A across the state. As of 9/17/2018, 396 confirmed cases of hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection have been reported with six out of 10 diagnosed individuals requiring hospitalization. You can help prevent the spread of hepatitis A in your community by immunizing individuals at increased risk:

- People with direct contact with individuals infected with the virus
- Men who have sex with men
- People who use street drugs whether they are injected or not
- People who are incarcerated
- People experiencing homelessness
- People who have traveled to other areas of the U.S. currently experiencing outbreaks

It is not necessary to perform serologies prior to vaccinating high-risk groups.

Clinical Factors
As you know, hepatitis A is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable liver infection. The infection spreads from person-to-person through ingestion of food, water or oral contact with objects (including hands) contaminated by feces of an HAV-infected individual. The incubation period is long (15-50 days) and people often develop symptoms of fever, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, appetite loss, jaundice, elevated liver function tests, dark urine, pale stools and diarrhea. HAV infection may last a few weeks to several months. Some individuals, especially if co-infected with hepatitis B or C, may develop fulminant liver failure resulting in death.

Preventing Hepatitis A
In addition to good hand hygiene after using the restroom and before handling food, hepatitis A vaccination is the best way to prevent HAV infection. ODH is supporting the effort of local health departments reporting HAV infection cases within their jurisdictions to provide post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), i.e. vaccinations, to exposed contacts. PEP can prevent infection in exposed persons if given within 14 days.

To date, involved local health departments have performed outreach and vaccination campaigns targeting high-risk populations through syringe exchange programs, substance use disorder providers, homeless shelters, and county jails.

Reporting HAV Cases to Public Health
HAV infection is a Class B reportable infectious disease in Ohio, and cases must be reported by the end of the next business day after the existence of a case, a suspected case, or a positive laboratory result is known. You can report HAV infection cases in the Ohio Disease Reporting System (ODRS). If you don’t have ODRS access, please report cases by contacting your local health department or ODH.

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More information about Ohio’s hepatitis A outbreak is available on the ODH website at [www.odh.ohio.gov](http://www.odh.ohio.gov) or [http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/bid/orbitdis/hepa.aspx](http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/bid/orbitdis/hepa.aspx). If you have any questions or need assistance, do not hesitate to contact your local health department or the ODH Bureau of Infectious Diseases at 614-995-5599.

Thank you for your partnership with public health in protecting and improving the health of Ohio communities.

Sincerely,

Clint Koenig MD, MA, MSPH  
Medical Director

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State Epidemiologist  
Chief, Bureau of Infectious Diseases