



PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

707 NORTH ARMSTRONG PLACE

BOISE, ID 83704-0825

TEL. (208) 327-8639

FAX (208) 327-8595

cdhd.idaho.gov

NEWS

May 24, 2019

Contacts:

Lindsay Haskell

Epidemiologist, CDHD

Office (208) 327-8622

Brandon Atkins

Clinic Program Manager, CDHD

Office (208) 327-8623

CDHD Offering Free Vaccine in Response to Hepatitis A Outbreak

Elmore County — Central District Health Department (CDHD), along with state public health, has been investigating a hepatitis A outbreak that began emerging in Southwest Idaho in early 2019. To date, nine cases of hepatitis A have been confirmed between Ada and Elmore counties, which are served by CDHD. Two of the nine cases are Elmore County residents. Neighboring counties, including Canyon, Blaine and Twin Falls have also seen a recent increase in hepatitis A cases, bringing the state count to 18 since Jan. 1, 2019. In 2018, only eight cases of hepatitis A were reported in Idaho.

About Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver and easily spreads by entering the mouth after someone touches an object, food or drink contaminated with the virus. If an infected person does not wash their hands well, especially after using the bathroom, small amounts of virus can spread from the hands of the infected person to other objects, surfaces, and food.

Hepatitis A can cause symptoms that range from mild to severe, and can last several months. Common symptoms include tiredness, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, low-grade fever, pale-colored bowel movements and dark urine, joint pain and yellowing of the whites of the eyes and skin (jaundice). Not everyone infected with hepatitis A will experience all of the symptoms and some will not have any symptoms.

Those at the highest risk for getting hepatitis A include:

- People who are living with or caring for a person who already has hepatitis A

- People living homeless, especially those living unsheltered without good access to sanitation, hygiene and handwashing facilities
- People who have sex with someone who has hepatitis A
- Men who have sex with men
- Illicit drug users (does not have to be injection drugs)
- People with clotting disorders like hemophilia
- International travelers
- People with chronic liver disease, including hepatitis B and hepatitis C are at increased risk for severe infections.

Preventing Hepatitis A: Free Vaccine Being Offered Through CDHD

Hepatitis A vaccination is the best way to prevent the virus. The shot is safe and effective; anyone who wants to reduce their risk of hepatitis A should get vaccinated. CDHD is offering free hepatitis vaccine to people experiencing homelessness, users of recreational drugs (injection and non-injection), men who have sex with men, and people without insurance or whose insurance does not cover the entire cost of vaccine.

Appointments are available on Wednesday, June 5 at CDHD's Elmore County clinic located at 520 E. 8th Street North in Mountain Home. Call 208-587-4407 to schedule in Elmore County on June 5 or a date thereafter. For an appointment in Ada County, call 208-327-7400.

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