

TO: Caledonia County Health Care Providers
FROM: Patsy Kelso PhD, State Epidemiologist for Infectious Disease

Hepatitis A in Caledonia County

Background

An individual in Caledonia County who worked in a limited food handling capacity has recently been diagnosed with hepatitis A. We ask area health care providers to be alert for people presenting with symptoms of acute hepatitis A and to report suspect cases by calling (802) 863-7240.

Clinical Features

The average incubation period for hepatitis A is 28 days (range: 15 to 50 days). Symptoms usually begin with abrupt onset of fever, malaise, anorexia, and nausea, followed in a few days by abdominal discomfort, jaundice, dark colored urine, and pale stools. Symptoms can range from mild to severe. In children younger than 6 years, 70 percent of infections are asymptomatic; if illness does occur, it is generally not accompanied by jaundice. Among older children and adults infection is typically symptomatic, with jaundice occurring in more than 70 percent of patients.

Requested Actions

- Consider Hepatitis A in patients with clinically compatible illness, and report suspect cases to the Health Department by calling (802) 863-7240.
- Test to confirm diagnosis. Serologic testing is required to distinguish hepatitis A from other types of viral hepatitis since clinical characteristics and epidemiologic features overlap. Collect serum and test for IgM antibody to hepatitis A virus. IgM is generally detectable five to 10 days before onset of symptoms and can persist for up to six months.
- Vaccinate with the full, two-dose series of hepatitis A vaccine to prevent HAV infection. Hepatitis A vaccine is licensed in the United States for use in people 12 months of age and older. The vaccine is recommended for all children at age 1 year, for people who are at increased risk for infection, for people who are at increased risk for complications from Hepatitis A, and anyone who wants to obtain immunity.
- Provide postexposure prophylaxis with either hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG) as recommended.

Postexposure Prophylaxis

Anyone who has been recently exposed to HAV and has not been vaccinated previously should be administered a single dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine or IG (0.02 mL/kg) as soon as possible, within two weeks after exposure.

The guidelines vary by age and health status:

- For healthy people age 12 months to 40 years, single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine at the age-appropriate dose is preferred to IG because it offers long-term protection and is as efficacious as IG.
- For people 40 years and older, IG is preferred because of the absence of information regarding vaccine performance in this age group and because of the more severe manifestations of hepatitis A in older adults. The magnitude of the risk of HAV transmission from the exposure should be considered in decisions to use vaccine or IG in this age group.
- Vaccine can be used if IG cannot be obtained.
- IG should not be used for children younger than 12 months, immunocompromised people, people with chronic liver disease, and those who are allergic to the vaccine or a vaccine component.

HAN Message Type Definitions

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.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Info Service Message: Provides general correspondence from VDH, which is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.