

DHHS Investigates Case of Hepatitis A in Food Service Worker

Concord, NH - The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) is investigating a case of hepatitis A in a food service worker. The adult from Hillsborough County worked at two locations in Contoocook, the Covered Bridge Restaurant and the American Legion. After initial investigation, DPHS estimates between 600 and 1000 people might have been exposed to the illness.

"We realize this may be concerning to anyone who may have been exposed to this illness at either of these establishments," said NH's Public Health Director Dr. Jose Montero. "While we believe the risk of exposure is extremely low, we are conducting a thorough investigation to help identify anyone who may be at risk so that they can receive prophylaxis."

Though there is no cure for hepatitis A, there is a vaccine and immune globulin can help prevent someone who has been exposed from getting sick. Anyone up to the age of 40 can receive the vaccine. Anyone over 40 and under 12 months is recommended to receive immune globulin (an antibody preparation). Hepatitis A vaccination provides protection before a person is exposed to the virus. The sooner someone receives the vaccine after exposure the more effective the vaccine is. If you were at either of the establishments between July 20th and August 3rd DPHS is recommending you receive either the vaccine or immune globulin at this time. If you have previously been vaccinated or if you have had hepatitis A infection you do not need any further vaccine for this situation. However, it is still early in the investigation and recommendations may change as the situation evolves.

DPHS is working with the Capital Area Public Health Network to offer vaccination clinics for anyone who may have been exposed to the virus. Those will be held Friday, August 9th from 12pm - 8pm and Saturday, August 10th from 9am - 2pm. Clinics will be held at the Hopkinton High School, 297 Park Ave, Contoocook, NH.

Hepatitis A is a virus that causes liver disease which sometimes requires hospitalization. It's spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. It can also be spread by sharing utensils or sexual contact. Symptoms usually come on quickly and may include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes.) People who develop Hepatitis A almost always recover from the illness without further complications.

Last year in New Hampshire there were 6 cases of hepatitis A identified. Prior to this case, 3 cases of hepatitis A were reported in 2013. Hepatitis A infection in food service workers is rare in New Hampshire, with the last case requiring public notification and mass prophylaxis occurring in 2004.

The New England Poison Control Center has been activated to assist with answering questions from the public about hepatitis A and the upcoming clinics. That # is: 1-800-562-8236

For more information about hepatitis A you can also visit DHHS' website at: www.dhhs.nh.gov or the Capital Area Public Health Network's website: www.capitalareaprepares.com.

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