December 12, 2019

Hepatitis A cases reported in Mobile County

MOBILE, Alabama — The Mobile County Health Department (MCHD) has received notification from the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) that four Mobile County residents have been confirmed for acute hepatitis A (HAV) infection. This classifies Mobile County as an “outbreak county” by ADPH.

Widespread person-to-person outbreaks of HAV are occurring across the United States including Alabama and neighboring states. Alabama has reported 203 HAV cases since the outbreak began in September 2018. Mississippi reports 96 outbreak cases since April 1, including 18 in George County and 2 in Jackson County.

For details on the Alabama HAV outbreak, visit http://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/immunization/assets/HepatitisAoutbreakreport.pdf.

HAV is spread person-to-person and through contaminated food or water. Anyone can be infected but certain groups are at greater risk during the outbreak including people who share drug paraphernalia, have recently been in jail or prison, are experiencing homelessness or transient living, have unprotected oral/anal sex or have close contact to persons with HAV infection. Vaccination and thorough hand washing are the best ways to protect from HAV infection.

“Adults with hepatitis A may have symptoms that include fatigue, low appetite, stomach pain, nausea, and jaundice. These symptoms usually resolve within two months of infection,” said Dr. Burnestine Taylor, Medical Officer for Disease Control and Prevention at ADPH. “Children less than 6 years of age generally do not have symptoms or have an unrecognized infection. Almost all people who get hepatitis A recover completely.”

The vaccine offers protection against infection from most exposures, whether the infected individuals have symptoms or not. The hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for anyone who participates in high-risk behaviors listed above and their contacts, and anyone who would like to protect themselves from the risk of infection. There is no treatment for HAV infection and more than half of patients require hospitalization for serious complications.

MCHD currently offers the hepatitis A vaccine at its Citronelle (19250 N. Mobile Street), Dauphin Island Parkway (2601 Dauphin Island Parkway), Eight Mile (4009 Saint Stephens Road), Newburn (248 Cox Street), North Mobile (950 East Coy Smith Highway) and Southwest Mobile (5580 Inn Road) Health Centers, as well as in Urgent Care and Pediatrics at the Keeler Memorial Building (251 North Bayou Street).

(Continued on next page)
“We continue to work with our community partners to raise awareness about the importance of handwashing and vaccination to prevent infection and serious illness in the populations at greatest risk,” said Dr. Rendi Murphree, an epidemiologist who serves as MCHD’s Bureau Director of Disease Surveillance and Environmental Services. She added that MCHD is working to acquire additional vaccine from the Section 317 program of the Public Health Service Act, which authorizes the federal purchase of vaccines for those with no insurance and for responding to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

The total out-of-pocket cost of the private stock adult dose of hepatitis A is $114 ($99 per vaccine plus $15 administration fee). If insured, hepatitis A vaccination is typically covered if considered to be preventative, however, each plan differs. The patient is encouraged to contact the insurance carrier before the encounter in the respective MCHD health center. If covered, the patient is responsible for his/her co-pay. As a Federally Qualified Health Center, MCHD offers a sliding fee scale for those that qualify and are seen for a primary care visit.

The pediatric hepatitis A vaccine will cost whatever the co-pay is if the child is insured. If the child has Medicaid, the child can receive Vaccines for Children (VFC) vaccine at no cost. If the child is not covered by Medicaid or insurance, the child can receive VFC vaccine at no cost but will be charged an administration of $15 to $19. The administration fee is based on income, so a proof of income is required to make that determination.

Medicaid does not cover vaccines for adults. Medicare only covers flu and pneumonia vaccines for adults 65 years of age and older.