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Hepatitis A virus identified in Alabama cases

MOBILE, Alabama — Several instances of residents being diagnosed with the hepatitis A virus have been reported in Alabama. This week it was announced the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) was investigating a food handler who was infected in Montgomery. In January, the ADPH was investigating multiple cases in Jackson and DeKalb counties.

Hepatitis A is a viral infection that can be transmitted person-to-person and by eating food or drinks prepared by an infected person. The hepatitis A vaccine can prevent infection, but only if given within 14 days of exposure to hepatitis A. The hepatitis A vaccine can be given to persons more than 12 months of age who have not completed the two-dose hepatitis A vaccination series. Persons more than 40 years old may also receive immune globulin.

“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.”

It is rare for hepatitis A to cause severe illness, but persons 50 years of age or older and those with other liver diseases are more at risk. The best way to prevent getting hepatitis A is to receive the vaccine within the first two weeks after exposure. Those who have previously been vaccinated with one dose of hepatitis A vaccine need a second dose. Two doses are required to be considered protected from exposure.

After being exposed to someone sick with hepatitis A, symptoms may appear from 15 to 50 days later. If you, your family, or friends are experiencing any of these symptoms, after contact with an infected person or with someone who participates in the behaviors listed above, they should contact their healthcare provider as soon as possible.

To reduce the spread of hepatitis A disease:

- Get vaccinated;
- Wash hands (Before, during and after preparing food; After using the toilet; After changing diapers or cleaning up a person who has used the toilet; After touching garbage; Before eating food; Before and after caring for someone who is sick);
- Do not share drug paraphernalia, cigarettes, food, drinks, eating utensils, towels or toothbrushes.

To learn more about the disease, visit <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/hepatitis/hep-a.html>