

August 29, 2019

Hepatitis A case reported on Alabama Gulf Coast

MOBILE, Alabama — The number of Hepatitis A virus (HAV) outbreak cases continue to increase in Alabama. Hepatitis A is a liver disease that can affect anyone.

Thirty cases of HAV were reported by the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) in July, including one in Baldwin County. This follows 23 reported cases in Alabama during June and 18 in May. Last week, the Jefferson County Department of Health announced three cases had been reported there, a threshold that it called an outbreak. The greatest number of cases have been recorded in DeKalb and Jackson counties.

The outbreak started in northeast Alabama in September 2018 and has spread throughout the state by July 2019. HAV is spread person-to-person through fecal-oral contact among unvaccinated persons.

To prevent the spread of HAV, individuals with risk factors should receive the HAV vaccine. Those at highest risk for HAV infection include people who use street drugs (injection or non-injection), who are currently or previously incarcerated, who are experiencing unstable housing or homelessness, or who engage in oral or anal sex.

In addition to close contact to known Hepatitis A cases, individuals may be exposed via an infected food handler at a restaurant, drug paraphernalia, jail or prison, homeless/transient living, oral/anal sex, or unvaccinated individuals who fail to wash their hands.

“Moms are correct: everyone should aggressively wash their hands with soap and water before eating anything,” said Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II, Health Officer for Mobile County.

Hepatitis A vaccination offers full protection against Hepatitis A infection from all exposures listed above, whether the infected individuals have symptoms or not. Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for anyone who participates in high-risk behaviors listed above and their contacts, and/or anyone who would like to protect themselves from the risk of infection.

The Mobile County Health Department 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).

The total out-of-pocket cost of the private stock adult dose of Hepatitis A is \$97 (\$85 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.

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.

Visit www.alabamapublichealth.gov/immunization/assets/HepatitisAoutbreakreport.pdf for more information.