

## Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable illness (CDC) that is spread person-to-person by ingesting something that has been contaminated with the feces of an infected person, which is also known as the “fecal-oral route”. This illness is found most commonly in people that use drugs (both oral and injection) as well as in homeless individuals. Symptoms of Hepatitis A can include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored stools, fatigue, loss of appetite, fever and jaundice, yellow coloring of the skin, called jaundice.

There have been several outbreaks of Hepatitis A across the United States over the past few months, but none in Connecticut. The Commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Public Health has developed an initiative to help prevent an outbreak from occurring in Connecticut by making the Hepatitis A vaccine available to those who may be at highest risk for exposure to Hepatitis A. This initiative will offer free vaccinations at locations where these at risk individuals currently seek other services, such as shelters, syringe exchange services and food pantries.

This vaccine is particularly important for individuals that may already have other liver problems such as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or other chronic liver disease. The vaccine would help to protect the liver from further damage and prevent more serious complications including death for these individuals. For those that do not have other medical conditions the illness is usually seen as an acute condition and will usually clear over a period of several weeks. The symptoms usually develop about 28 days after exposure to the virus but can be delayed for as much as 50 days after exposure.

The vaccine itself is typically provided as a 2-dose series, given 6 months apart. A common concern is, “What if I don’t get the second dose, am I still protected?” The answer is yes, but ideally, the best protection comes from getting the full 2 doses, but there is still significant protection from just 1 dose. This makes the effort to reach the homeless and individuals using drugs even more important. Unfortunately, these folks find themselves in situations where access to good hygiene or medical care maybe limited, placing them at higher risk for becoming infected. This vaccine can help reduce that risk significantly.

The Uncas Health District is committed to preventing the spread of Hepatitis A, as well as other communicable diseases. We will be offering a clinic for Hepatitis vaccination at St. Vincent de Paul Place, 120 Cliff Street in Norwich on Friday August 31, 2018 from 8:30 AM – 10:00 AM. No appointment needed. If you have questions about the Hepatitis A vaccine, please contact our Public Health Nurse, **Sue Dubb** at 860-639-5139.

**Sources:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) / Connecticut Department of Public Health

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