



## NEWS RELEASE

### Public Health

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## San Bernardino County hepatitis A update



San Bernardino County's hepatitis A cases appear to be slowing this year compared to last year, but the Department of Public Health is urging people to continue to be vigilant about the virus following the death of a man earlier this month.

Since January, there have been 20 confirmed cases of hepatitis A in the County, 10 suspected cases and 1 probable case among county residents. Last year, there were 39 hepatitis A cases reported and only 3 in 2018.

The death from hepatitis A occurred this month in an older man with underlying health conditions. This is the first hepatitis A death since 2010.

"Our deepest condolences go out to the man's family and loved ones," says Dr. Erin Gustafson, San Bernardino County Interim Health Officer. "This serves as a reminder that COVID-19 is not the only danger to the health of our community."

Hepatitis A is an acute viral infection that affects the liver. Person-to-person transmission of hepatitis A virus can occur not only among individuals who report drug use and/or homelessness, but also among those they have close contact with, or consumption of contaminated food or water. Infection can result from contaminated needles and other injection equipment, sexual contact or from poor sanitary conditions. This virus typically spreads through the fecal-oral route and causes symptoms such as fatigue, poor appetite, fever and nausea. Hepatitis A can become a serious illness and individuals experiencing similar symptoms are encouraged to contact their healthcare provider.

Cases are predominantly occurring among high-risk populations such as drug users and individuals experiencing homelessness. Hepatitis A outbreaks began in San Diego County in 2017-2018 and were associated with the same at-risk population. Although the outbreak in San Diego County has subsided, clusters continue to occur nationwide.

To prevent hepatitis A infection, the following is recommended:

- Receive the hepatitis A vaccine from your healthcare provider, if not previously vaccinated. Please call 909-252-4407 for information on how to get vaccinated if you don't have a healthcare provider.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing diapers and before preparing and/or eating food. Proper hand-washing with soap and water is strongly encouraged when possible. If hand sanitizer is the only option, **non-alcohol based hand sanitizers can be effective against the hepatitis A virus.** The majority of alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective against bacteria, but **not** as effective in killing viruses like the hepatitis A virus.
- Practice safer sex. Always use condoms and try to know your partner's hepatitis A status and avoid sex with individuals infected with the virus.
- Do not share towels, toothbrush or eating utensils with other individuals.
- Do not share food, drinks or cigarettes with other individuals.

For more information, please contact the Department of Public Health Communicable Disease Section at (800) 722-4794, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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