



NEWS RELEASE

Public Health

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Public Health Department working to prevent hepatitis A



Although San Bernardino County is not experiencing an outbreak of hepatitis A, County health officials are working diligently to protect residents from the disease. It is important to be proactive in preventing the spread of hepatitis A in light of the outbreaks that are occurring in Los Angeles, San Diego and Santa Cruz counties among the homeless population and those who use illicit drugs.

"We are working hard to prevent the spread of hepatitis A among our residents," says San Bernardino County Health Officer, Dr. Maxwell Ohikhuare. "Together, with our community partners, we are increasing outreach and awareness to promote hepatitis A vaccination. The Department will offer the hepatitis A vaccine to our homeless residents by visiting encampments and shelters and we will ensure vaccine availability at our public health clinics."

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. Mild cases can last a few weeks, while severe cases can last several months, and may lead to death. Anyone can get hepatitis A, but a person is at higher risk if they:

- Are homeless and/or use illicit drugs
- Live with someone who has hepatitis A
- Use recreational drugs
- Are a man who has sex with men
- Have sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis A
- Travel or live in countries where hepatitis A is common

Hepatitis A can be spread by:

- Touching objects or eating food that someone with hepatitis A infection has handled
- Having sex with someone who has a hepatitis A infection
- Consuming food or drinks that are contaminated by the virus
- Sharing needles, pipes or other items when using drugs
- Forgetting to wash your hands after using the bathroom or changing the diaper of an infected person

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is by getting vaccinated. The hepatitis A vaccine is given as two shots, six months apart. It can also be prevented by washing hands with soap and water, scrubbing vigorously for 20 seconds before eating or preparing food, as well as after using the bathroom or changing diapers.

Insured residents should speak to their health care provider regarding their immunization status. For more information about outreach services or receiving the vaccine at a Public Health Clinic, contact the Communicable Disease Section at 1 (800) 722-4794.