



## NEWS RELEASE

### Public Health

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February 6, 2020

## Hepatitis A outbreak in San Bernardino County

San Bernardino County is experiencing an outbreak of reported hepatitis A cases. Between Jan. 1, 2019 and Feb. 6, 2020, 42 confirmed hepatitis A cases have been identified among county residents. By comparison, there were three hepatitis A cases reported in all of 2018. Clusters of cases have been identified in the cities of Redlands and San Bernardino.

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.

"The most effective way to prevent hepatitis A is to receive the vaccine," says Dr. Erin Gustafson, San Bernardino County Assistant Health Officer. "It is also very important to wash your hands with soap and water regularly to protect yourself from this virus."

To prevent hepatitis A infection, the following is recommended:

- Receive the hepatitis A vaccine from your healthcare provider, if not previously vaccinated.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing diapers and before preparing and/or eating food.
- 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.

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.

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.

For more information, please call the Communicable Disease Section at (909) 520-5166, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

