

Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH)
Alabama Emergency Response Technology (ALERT) Health Alert Network (HAN)
12/21/2018

ADPH Needs Your Help to Stop the Spread of a Hepatitis A Outbreak

Key Message

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) is investigating an outbreak of hepatitis A in Northeastern Alabama, specifically Jackson County. Hepatitis A spreads rapidly in high-risk populations, including people who use recreational drugs, men who have sex with men, and individuals who are experiencing homelessness or in transient living. ADPH encourages all healthcare providers to recognize symptoms of hepatitis A, collect and submit specimens for testing, report the presumptive diagnoses immediately, and vaccinate the patient's family and close contacts. ADPH recommends providers vaccinate anyone in the high-risk groups, even if there is no known contact to symptomatic people.

Key Facts

- In the 12 months prior to this outbreak investigation, Alabama had 28 cases statewide.
- On December 18, 2018, ADPH became aware of 7 recent hepatitis A cases in Jackson County.
- Tennessee has been investigating a similar hepatitis A outbreak over the last 12 months with over 500 cases identified.

Objectives

- Vaccinating as many people as possible with Hep A vaccine is essential in stopping the spread of this disease.
- ADPH recommends providers vaccinate anyone in the following high-risk groups, even if no known contact to symptomatic people:
 - People who use recreational drugs.
 - Men who have sex with men.
 - Individuals who are experiencing homelessness or in transient living.
- If a patient presents with acute onset of symptoms of hepatitis and jaundice or fever, abdominal pain, headache, vomiting, nausea, malaise, dark urine, and/or anorexia who had contact with a person diagnosed with hepatitis A, consider the diagnosis of hepatitis A disease and contact ADPH at 1-800-469-4599 (24/7/365).
- A presumptive diagnosis of hepatitis A must be reported within 24 hours by physicians, nurses, hospital administrators, infection control practitioners, AND laboratory directors.

Specimen Collection and Shipping

ADPH would like all (suspected and confirmed) specimens sent to be genetically characterized. Follow instructions below to properly collect and send specimens to the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories (BCL).

- Collect blood sample in tiger/red top tube, centrifuge, extract approximately 2-3 ml serum and place in sterile tube.
- Serum should be kept refrigerated (2-8°C) until ready to ship.
- The specimen should be placed in an insulated container with frozen ice packs for shipping.
- Complete a BCL Requisition Form for each specimen and test ordered, http://www.adph.org/bcl/assets/BCL_Requisition_Form.pdf. Include patient information, specimen collection date, date of symptom onset, as well as dates, locations of recent travel, and relevant vaccine history.
- Specimens may be dropped off at your local county health department to be couriered to the BCL overnight, or can be shipped directly to the BCL at 8140 AUM Drive, Montgomery, AL 36117 (at your expense).
- If you have questions about specimen collection and shipping, call the BCL at 334-260-3400 or email mclab@adph.state.al.us.

A news release will be issued for affected counties next week.

Primary Point of Contact

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Secondary Points of Contact

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