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MDHHS continuing investigation of hepatitis A outbreak that has resulted in 920 cases in Michigan, including 30 deaths

LANSING, Mich. – State and local public health officials continue to investigate an extended hepatitis A outbreak that has affected Michigan and surrounding states.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is encouraging residents to be aware of the associated risk factors, the importance of handwashing and the available vaccination to prevent the hepatitis A infection.

Since this outbreak began in August of 2016, Michigan has seen 920 hepatitis A cases. Eighty percent of those individuals have been hospitalized and 30 have died. Fifty-two percent of the people who have suffered from the disease have documented substance use. Although many of these outbreak cases were seen earlier in the outbreak, it is important to remain diligent in awareness around hepatitis A.

There have been seven recent acute cases of hepatitis A in Kalkaska, Grand Traverse and Antrim counties in Northwest Lower Michigan. That strain is not the same as the Michigan outbreak strain but has been circulating nationally in several other states. Several of these individuals also have reported substance use as a risk factor.

“Although Michigan has not seen the number of cases of hepatitis A that we have during the height of the outbreak, it is essential that people with risk factors for hepatitis A continue to be vaccinated,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy director for health at MDHHS.

On a national level, 30 states are reporting hepatitis A outbreaks since 2016. These numbers are still rising and include several states near Michigan. According to The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Ohio has had 3,274 cases, Indiana has had 2,043 cases and Illinois has had 153 cases. Total cases reported nationally are 24,952 with 14,984 (60%) hospitalized and 244 deaths.

The hepatitis A virus is found in the feces of people with hepatitis A. The virus can spread through contaminated food or water and through close contact with a person who has the virus.

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable disease and MDHHS encourages a hepatitis A virus vaccination for at-risk individuals, including people with a history of injection and non-injection drug use, homelessness or transient housing, incarceration and men who
have sex with men. In addition, routine Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommendations continue to apply for those at risk of hepatitis A infection. The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective and is available at local pharmacies, through healthcare providers and at local health departments.

Good handwashing practices; not sharing personal items such as towels, toothbrushes and eating utensils; and avoiding sex with infected partners are also ways to prevent getting infected.

For more information on the hepatitis A outbreak in Michigan, visit Michigan.gov/hepAoutbreak.

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