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Hepatitis A Summary and Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 10/25/2017

Summary of San Diego hepatitis A Outbreak, 2017

The San Diego County Public Health Officer declared a local public health emergency on September 1, 2017 due to the ongoing hepatitis A virus outbreak in the county. The County Board of Supervisors ratified this declaration on September 6, 2017 and again on September 12, 2017. The County Board of Supervisors shall ratify the declaration every two weeks until the declaration is rescinded.

Since early 2017, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency' Public Health Services has been investigating the hepatitis A outbreak. Control of the outbreak has been challenging because of the long time that it takes for the disease to develop (15 to 50 days) after a person is exposed to the infection (i.e. incubation period), and the difficulty of contacting many individuals sickened with the illness because they are homeless and/or illegal drug users.

The outbreak is being spread person-to-person through contact with a fecal-contaminated environment. The majority of people who have contracted hepatitis A during this outbreak have been homeless and/or illegal drug users. This is not a foodborne outbreak; no common sources of food, beverage or drugs have been identified to contribute to this outbreak. The investigation, however, is ongoing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), person-to-person transmission through close contact is the primary way people get hepatitis A in the United States¹. Vaccination efforts are being implemented in targeted locations by County staff and, in collaboration with, health care partners.

For weekly updates on total cases, hospitalizations, deaths, additional educational resources, and the latest public communications (e.g., news stories and health alerts), please go to the [County's Hepatitis A webpage](#).

¹ CDC Hepatitis A Website <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/havfaq.htm#A3>



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I. Definitions

- **Antibody**: a substance found in the blood that the body makes in response to a virus. **Antibodies** protect the body from disease by attaching to the virus and destroying it.
- **At-risk populations**: Due to the [current outbreak](#), the San Diego County Public Health Officer strongly recommends the following groups be vaccinated with the hepatitis A vaccine:
 - People who are homeless.
 - Users of illegal drugs.
 - Men who have sex with men.
 - People with chronic liver disease, such as cirrhosis, hepatitis B or hepatitis C. They may not be at increased risk of getting hepatitis A but are at increased risk of poor outcomes if infected.
 - People who work with, provide services to, or clean up after the homeless and/or illegal drug users
 - Food handlers who have adult clients. Food handlers are not at increased risk, but if infected can impact large number of people. Children get routine vaccinations for hepatitis A, so vaccination is not recommended for food handlers in schools unless they are in an **at-risk populations** group.
 - Anyone who is concerned about hepatitis A virus contact and wants to be immune. During the present outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is not being recommended for general public.
 - * In addition to several of the above groups, the CDC routinely [recommends vaccinations](#) for:
 - People with clotting factor disorders.
 - People who conduct laboratory research with the virus.
 - Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common.
 - People in close personal contact with adopted children from countries where hepatitis A is common.
- **Hepatitis A infection**: hepatitis A is highly contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus that attacks the liver. People infected with hepatitis A usually get better on their own after a few months, but they can be very sick during infection (nausea, vomiting, tiredness, skin or eyes turning yellow, dark urine). Not everyone gets symptoms when they have hepatitis A. hepatitis A is fecal oral disease, meaning the virus has to be ingested after contact with contaminated objects, food or sex. Frequent hand washing can help prevent the spread of hepatitis A. A vaccine can protect against hepatitis A.
- **Immune globulin**: a substance made from human blood plasma that contains antibodies that protect against infection. It is given as a shot and provides short-term protection (approximately 3 months) against hepatitis A. **Immune globulin** can be given either before contact to the hepatitis A virus (such as before travel to a country where hepatitis A is common) or to prevent infection after contact to the hepatitis A virus. **Immune globulin** must be given within 2 weeks after contact for the best protection. Note: the vaccine can also be used for protection after recent exposure among certain populations.

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II. Hepatitis A Overview

❖ *How can hepatitis A virus be prevented?*

- Frequent hand washing can help prevent the spread of hepatitis A. A vaccine can protect against hepatitis A. During the present outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is **NOT** being recommended for the San Diego general public and is being recommended only for the **at-risk populations**.
- The hepatitis A vaccine series is given as two shots, with the second shot given at least six months after the first. The first shot is 90-95% effective. The second shot of the series is preferred for long-term protection but can be delayed. While there is not a shortage of vaccine currently, we have a limited supply of the vaccine. During the current outbreak, we want to use that supply to focus on at-risk populations and make sure to get that first dose to as many people as possible to help contain the outbreak as soon as possible.
 - The vaccine may also be given as a twin vaccine against both hepatitis A and B, which is given as three shots over six months (at 0, 1, and 6 months) for those 18 years of age and older.
- Do not have sex with someone who has hepatitis A virus infection.
- Use your own towels, toothbrushes and eating utensils.
- Do not share food, drinks or smokes with other people.
- Wash hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing food or eating.

❖ *What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?*

- Some people with hepatitis A do not have any symptoms. Symptoms can develop 2 to 7 weeks (15-50 days) after exposure. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children are. If you do have symptoms, they may include the following:
 - Fever
 - Nausea
 - Vomiting
 - Dark urine
 - Joint pain
 - Fatigue
 - Loss of appetite
 - Stomach pain
 - Clay-colored or pale stools (bowel movements)
 - Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)

❖ *How long does it take symptoms to appear after being exposed to, hepatitis A?*

- If symptoms occur, they usually appear anywhere from 2 to 7 weeks (15 -50 days) after exposure and typically develop over several days.

❖ *How long do hepatitis A symptoms last?*

- People infected with hepatitis A will generally be ill for about one month. In rare cases, some people can remain symptomatic up to 6 months.

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❖ *Can a person spread hepatitis A without having symptoms?*

- Yes. Some people, especially children, show no symptoms. In addition, a person can be infectious and spread the virus to others for up to 2 weeks before symptoms appear and for 1 week after developing jaundice. Hepatitis A is fecal oral disease, meaning the virus has to be ingested after contact with contaminated objects, food or sex. Washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before eating, after using bathrooms, and preparing food should protect individuals.

❖ *I was near someone who I think had hepatitis A recently. What should I do?*

- Call or visit your health care provider. If you were recently exposed to hepatitis A virus and have not been vaccinated against hepatitis A, you might benefit from an injection of either hepatitis A vaccine **or immune globulin**. However, the vaccine or **immune globulin** must be given within the first 2 weeks after exposure to be effective. A health professional can decide what is best based on your age and overall health. If you are uninsured and do not have a provider, please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic .

❖ *How is it spread?*

- Primarily the fecal-oral route spreads the hepatitis A virus. This is when an uninfected person takes in the virus by mouth. This can occur after contact with contaminated objects, food or drinks that have been contaminated with even a tiny or microscopic amount of the feces from an infected person. For example, this can happen when:
 - Touching objects or eating food that someone with hepatitis A virus infection handled, or
 - Having sex with someone who has hepatitis A virus infection (not limited to anal-oral contact).

❖ *I think I might have the hepatitis A virus. What should I do?*

- Call or visit your health care provider right away. If it is a true emergency, call 911. A health care provider can screen your symptoms and take a blood sample to help determine if you have hepatitis A.
- Go see your health care provider right away to be medically evaluated. If you are uninsured and do not have a provider, please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic to visit right away. If it is a true medical emergency, call 9-1-1.

❖ *If I have had hepatitis A in the past, can I get it again?*

- No. Once you completely recover from hepatitis A, you develop **antibodies** that protect you from the virus for life. A small minority of people affected by hepatitis A can have recurring hepatitis. If you had hepatitis A and are having similar symptoms, a few months later please visit your health care provider. If you are uninsured and do not have a provider, please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic to visit.

❖ *How long does hepatitis A virus survive outside the body?*

- The hepatitis A virus is very strong. It is able to live outside the body for months, depending on the environmental conditions. According to the CDC, high temperatures,

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such as boiling or cooking food or liquids for at least 1 minute at 185°F (85°C), kills the virus, but freezing temperatures do not.

❖ *What is the difference between hepatitis A, B and C?*

- Hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C are three different and common viruses that can cause hepatitis, or inflammation of the liver. Each virus has a different way of spreading and can affect the liver differently.
- **Hepatitis A** appears only as a new infection, and does not become long lasting. Healthy people with hepatitis A usually improve without treatment. People with chronic liver disease who get hepatitis A have an increased risk for complications or even death.
- Hepatitis B and hepatitis C can also begin as new infections, but in some people, the virus remains in the body, resulting in chronic disease and long-term liver problems. There are vaccines to prevent hepatitis A and B; however, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.
- If a person has had one type of viral hepatitis in the past, it is still possible to get the other types.

❖ *Can dogs and cats get hepatitis A (from humans)?*

- No.

III. **Current Outbreak**

❖ *Why declare a local health emergency?*

- A local health emergency has been declared to raise awareness of the hepatitis A outbreak. It allows for the activation of the County Medical Reserve Corps program. It may also make it easier to purchase supplies. While no specific funding is available because of this declaration, this action allows the County to request mutual aid, if necessary.

❖ *What area is covered by the local health emergency?*

- The entire County of San Diego is covered by the local health emergency.

❖ *Why isn't the County doing more to protect the public from this disease?*

- Since early March when it was determined that the number of cases of hepatitis A was greater than normal, especially in the homeless and illegal drug user populations, the County has been working closely with other County departments, community partners (including homeless and drug treatments services providers, hospitals, federally qualified health clinics, cities, law enforcement, businesses, food and beverage industry associations, pharmacies, and others), the California Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to address this unprecedented hepatitis A outbreak. Many prevention and vaccination efforts have been conducted and are ongoing.

❖ *Who should get the hepatitis A Virus Vaccine?*

- During the current outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for the **at-risk populations listed** below and is not being recommended for the general public.

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- People who are homeless.
- Users of illegal drugs.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People with chronic liver disease, such as cirrhosis, hepatitis B or hepatitis C. They may not be at increased risk of getting hepatitis A but are at increased risk of poor outcomes if infected.
- People who work with, provide services to, or clean up after the homeless and/or illegal drug users
- Food handlers who have adult clients. Food handlers are not at increased risk, but if infected can affect large number of people. Children get routine vaccinations for hepatitis A, so vaccination is not recommended for food handlers in schools unless they are in an **at-risk populations** group.
- Anyone who is concerned about hepatitis A virus contact and wants to be immune. During the present outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is not being recommended for general public.
- In addition to several of the above groups, the CDC routinely recommends vaccinations for:
 - People with clotting factor disorders.
 - People who conduct laboratory research with the virus.
 - Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common.
 - People in close personal contact with adopted children from countries where hepatitis A is common.

IV. General Vaccine Information:

❖ *What is the hepatitis A vaccine?*

- The hepatitis A vaccine is an inactivated (not live) hepatitis A virus. After someone gets a hepatitis A vaccine, their body makes **antibodies** that protect them against the live virus if they were to be exposed to it in the future.

❖ *How many shots of the hepatitis A vaccine do I need?*

- The hepatitis A vaccine series is given as two shots, with the second shot given at least six months after the first. The first shot is 90-95% effective. The second shot of the series is preferred for long-term protection but can be delayed. While there is not a shortage of vaccine currently, we have a limited supply of the vaccine. During the current outbreak, we want to use that supply to focus on at-risk populations and make sure to get that first dose to as many people as possible to help contain the outbreak as soon as possible.
 - The vaccine may also be given as a twin vaccine against both hepatitis A and B, which is given as three shots over six months (at 0, 1, and 6 months) for those 18 years of age and older.

❖ *Is the hepatitis A vaccine safe and effective?*

- Yes, the vaccine is safe and highly effective in preventing hepatitis A virus infection. You will be protected approximately 2 to 4 weeks after the first injection and longer-term defense is gained with the second injection.

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- If you do not remember whether you were vaccinated, ask your health care provider, call the San Diego Immunization Records (619) 692-5656 or email them at sdir@sdiz.org. Repeating the vaccination series is not harmful. Vaccination after the first shot is at least 90% effective.
 - According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), before the hepatitis A vaccine became available in 1995, more than 250,000 people became infected with hepatitis A each year in the U.S. In 2014, there were about 2,500 cases reported.
- ❖ *Will the hepatitis A vaccine protect someone from other forms of hepatitis?*
- Hepatitis A vaccine will only protect someone from hepatitis A. There is both a separate vaccine for hepatitis B and a combination vaccine that protects a person from hepatitis A and hepatitis B. No vaccine is available for hepatitis C at this time.
- ❖ *Is it harmful to have an extra dose of hepatitis A vaccine or to repeat the entire hepatitis A vaccine series?*
- No, getting extra doses of hepatitis A vaccine is not harmful but is not needed if you were previously vaccinated, as there is no recommendation. Your health care provider should check the immunization registry when possible before administering the vaccine.
- ❖ *What should be done if the last dose of hepatitis A vaccine is delayed?*
- The hepatitis A vaccine series is given as two shots, with the second shot given at least six months after the first. The first shot is 90-95% effective. The second shot of the series is preferred for long-term protection but can be delayed. While there is not a shortage of vaccine currently, we have a limited supply of the vaccine. During the current outbreak, we want to use that supply to focus on at-risk populations and make sure to get that first dose to as many people as possible to help contain the outbreak as soon as possible.
 - If over 6 months have elapsed, a health care provider should give the second or last dose after six months as soon as possible. Regardless of length of delay, the second shot can be given and first dose does not need to be given again.
- ❖ *I think I might have the hepatitis A virus, but I am not sure. Should I be vaccinated?*
- If you are determined to have hepatitis A virus, there is no treatment and no vaccine is needed as the disease provides lifetime immunity.
- ❖ *I got a hepatitis A vaccine 15-20 years ago. Is it still good?*
- Yes, you should still be protected and there is no need a booster. According to the CDC, protective levels of antibody to the hepatitis A virus have been shown to be present for at least 20 years and are estimated to last 40 or more years.²
- ❖ *Is there enough vaccine for all recommended groups in the County?*
- During the current outbreak, the vaccine is not indicated for the general public, and vaccination efforts across the County are being prioritized for **at-risk populations**. Currently there is enough vaccine for the **at-risk populations**.

² CDC hepatitis A Questions and Answers for Health Professionals <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/havfaq.htm#B4>



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❖ ***Should I get two shots of vaccine or one?***

- There is no requirement for vaccination. The hepatitis A vaccine series is given as two shots, with the second shot given at least six months after the first. The first shot is 90-95% effective. The second shot of the series is preferred for long-term protection but can be delayed. While there is not a shortage of vaccine currently, we have a limited supply of the vaccine. During the current outbreak, we want to use that supply to focus on at-risk populations and make sure to get that first dose to as many people as possible to help contain the outbreak as soon as possible.

❖ ***What vaccination efforts are underway?***

- The County, in collaboration with our community health care, homeless, and behavioral health partners, have given thousands of vaccines in response to the outbreak and are striving to give thousands more.

❖ ***Can hepatitis A vaccine be given to those that have hepatitis C or other liver issues?***

- Yes. Because hepatitis A vaccine is inactivated (not “live”), it can be given to people with compromised immune systems. Hepatitis A vaccine is specifically recommended for those with hepatitis C and other liver diseases, since individuals with existing liver disease (such as hepatitis C) may be at risk for very serious health outcomes if they get hepatitis A.

V. **Population with Preexisting Conditions:**

❖ ***Can hepatitis A vaccine be given to immunocompromised persons, such as hemodialysis patients or persons with AIDS?***

- Yes. It can be given to people with compromised immune systems since hepatitis A vaccine is inactivated and not “live”.

❖ ***Can hepatitis A vaccine be given to those that have hepatitis C or other liver issues?***

- Yes. Because hepatitis A vaccine is inactivated (not “live”), it can be given to people with compromised immune systems. Hepatitis A vaccine is specifically recommended for those with hepatitis C and other liver diseases, since individuals with existing liver disease (such as hepatitis C) may be at-risk for worse outcomes if they get hepatitis A.

❖ ***Can hepatitis A vaccine be given to immunocompromised persons, such as hemodialysis patients or persons with AIDS?***

- Yes. It can be given to people with compromised immune systems since hepatitis A vaccine is inactivated and not “live”.

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VII. Service Professionals

❖ *Why is vaccination “recommended” for food handlers who serve adult clients?*

- Food handlers can become infected with hepatitis A through causes unrelated to their food facility work and unintentionally spread it, while handling food, before the infection is recognized. (Remember someone can be infectious for two weeks prior to developing the symptoms or jaundice.)
- Food handlers who have adult clients are recommended for vaccination. Food handlers are not at increased risk, but if infected can affect large number of people. Children get routine vaccinations for hepatitis A, so vaccination is not recommended for food handlers in schools unless they are in an **at-risk population**.
- A vaccine is recommended to prevent getting and spreading serious diseases that could result in poor health, missed work, medical bills and not being able to care for family.
- To receive a vaccine please check with your employer on whether or not your occupational health provider offers the vaccine
- If your occupational health provider does not offer the vaccine and you are **INSURED** please check with your local health care provider or pharmacist.
 - Call ahead to see if they have the vaccine and your local pharmacy accepts your insurance. If a pharmacy does not accept your insurance, call your health plan to find out what pharmacies they work with. The vaccination is covered as a pharmacy benefit for several insurance sources, including Medi-Cal fee for service and managed care, as well as several qualified health plans through Covered California.
- If your occupational health provider does not offer the vaccine and you are **uninsured** please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic or public health center to receive a vaccination.
- Medi-Cal covers this vaccine without prior authorization.

❖ *In my occupation, I work closely with or clean up after the homeless or drug user populations. Where should I go to receive a vaccination?*

- To receive a vaccine please check with your employer on whether or not your occupational health provider offers the vaccine.
- If your occupational health provider does not offer the vaccine and you are **INSURED** please check with your local health care provider or pharmacist. Call ahead to see if they have the vaccine and your local pharmacy accepts your insurance. If a pharmacy does not accept your insurance, call your health plan to find out what pharmacies they work with. The vaccination is covered as a pharmacy benefit for several insurance sources, including Medi-Cal fee for service and managed care, as well as several qualified health plans through Covered California.
- If your occupational health provider does not offer the vaccine and you are **uninsured** please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic or public health center to receive a vaccination.

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❖ *I routinely work with homeless and/or illegal drug users and am a health care worker. What precautions should I take?*

- Staff in healthcare environments would be expected to be protected by using standard precautions; however, due to the ongoing outbreak it is also recommended that staffs who routinely work with homeless and/or illegal drug user receive hepatitis A virus vaccination for long-term protection.
- To receive a vaccine, please check with your employer on whether or not your occupational health provider offers the vaccine.
- If your occupational health provider does not offer the vaccine and you are **INSURED** please check with your local health care provider or pharmacist. Call ahead to see if they have the vaccine and your local pharmacy accepts your insurance. If a pharmacy does not accept your insurance, call your health plan to find out what pharmacies they work with.
- If your occupational health provider does not offer the vaccine and you are **uninsured** please call call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic or public health center to receive a vaccination.

❖ *Can businesses that have employees who are recommended to be vaccinated require their employees to be vaccinated or show proof of vaccination?*

- Businesses should consult with their human resources department about requiring a vaccine for employment.

❖ *What can local businesses do to prevent the further spread of hepatitis A?*

- Remind employees of the importance of hand washing with soap and water after using the bathroom, and before preparing, serving or eating food.
- Maintain routine and consistent cleaning of bathrooms for employees and the public, using a chlorine-based disinfectant (bleach) with a ratio of 1 and 2/3 cup of bleach to one gallon of water. Due to the high bleach concentration of this mix, rinse surfaces with water after 1 minute of contact time and wear gloves while cleaning.
- For employees in physical contact with others, especially those **at-risk populations** for hepatitis A wear disposable gloves and wash hands after each encounter.
- Coordinate with your occupational health provider to determine if hepatitis A vaccine should be offered to employees. Due to the ongoing outbreak, it is recommended that staff who handles food and serve adult clients be vaccinated.

❖ *Is a prescription needed if an employee goes to a nearby pharmacy?*

- No.

VIII. Vaccine Access:

❖ *Can those who are recommended to be vaccinated get vaccinations free of charge?*

- During the current outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for the **at-risk populations identified** above and is not being recommended for the general public.

Please Note: For Bolded words a definition can be found in Section I. Definitions



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- Individuals should contact their health care provider, pharmacy or health insurance provider to obtain the cost of vaccination.
 - To receive a vaccine please check with your employer on whether or not your occupational health provider offers the vaccine if your part of the **at-risk populations** service professionals.
 - If your occupational health provider does not offer the vaccine and you are **INSURED** please check with your local health care provider or pharmacist.
 - Call ahead to see if they have the vaccine and your local pharmacy accepts your insurance. If a pharmacy does not accept your insurance, call your health plan to find out what pharmacies they work with. The vaccination is covered as a pharmacy benefit for several insurance sources, including Medi-Cal fee for service and managed care, as well as several qualified health plans through Covered California.
 - If your occupational health provider does not offer the vaccine and you are uninsured please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic or public health center to receive a vaccination.
 - Medi-Cal covers this vaccine with no prior authorization. Individuals should contact their provider, pharmacy or health insurance provider to obtain the cost of vaccination.
- ❖ *I went to my health care provider to get a hepatitis A vaccine but they were going to charge me for an office visit. Isn't this a free vaccine?*
- During the current outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for the **at-risk populations** identified above and is not being recommended for the general public.
 - Currently, the vaccine is free to **at-risk population's** populations. Individuals should always check with their personal or occupational health provider first when seeking a vaccination (e.g., influenza, pneumococcal, hepatitis A, hepatitis B) as the vaccine may have no co-pay, but the provider may charge the patient for an office visit to be evaluated for the vaccine. Most providers have a mechanism for their patients to obtain vaccinations, which often includes getting a vaccination from a local pharmacy.
 - If you are part of the **at-risk populations** and
 - If you are **INSURED**, please check with your occupational health provider, local health care provider or pharmacist. Call ahead to see if they have the vaccine and your local pharmacy accepts your insurance. If a pharmacy does not accept your insurance, call your health plan to find out what pharmacies they work with. The vaccination is covered as a pharmacy benefit for several insurance sources, including Medi-Cal fee for service and managed care, as well as several qualified health plans through Covered California.
 - Medi-Cal covers this vaccine without prior authorization.
 - If you are uninsured, please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic or public health center to request the hepatitis A vaccine.

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- ❖ *I want the hepatitis A vaccine and do not have insurance. How much does it typically cost if I have to pay out-of-pocket? Where should I go?*
 - During the current outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for the **at-risk populations** identified above and is not being recommended for the general public. If you are part of the **at-risk populations** and
 - If you are uninsured, please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic or public health center to request the hepatitis A vaccine.
 - If you do not currently have health insurance, visit www.HealthCare.gov for more information about finding health insurance or the Affordable Care Act.
 - Children younger than 19 years of age are eligible for Vaccine for Children (VFC) program, if they are Medi-Cal-eligible, American Indian or Alaska Native or have no health insurance. If you do not have insurance, or if it does not cover vaccines, the VFC program may be able to help. This program provides vaccines at no cost to health care providers approved by the California Department of Public Health Vaccine For Children's Program who serve eligible children.
 - Adults age 19 years and older who are uninsured (have no health insurance) or under-insured (vaccine is not covered by their insurance) may be eligible to receive hepatitis A vaccine through the Federal 317-funded Vaccine for Adults (VFA) program. This program provides vaccines at no cost to local health department immunization clinics and certain Federally Qualified Health Centers.

IX. Vaccine Locations

- ❖ *Where can I be vaccinated?*
 - During the current outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for the **at-risk populations** identified above and is not being recommended for the general public. If you are part of the **at-risk populations** groups and
 - If you are INSURED, please check with your occupational health provider, local health care provider or pharmacist. Call ahead to see if they have the vaccine and your local pharmacy accepts your insurance. If a pharmacy does not accept your insurance, call your health plan to find out what pharmacies they work with. The vaccination is covered as a pharmacy benefit for several insurance sources, including Medi-Cal fee for service and managed care, as well as several qualified health plans through Covered California.
 - Medi-Cal covers this vaccine without prior authorization.
 - If you are uninsured, please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic or public health center to request the hepatitis A vaccine.
- ❖ *Where can a County employee be vaccinated?*
 - County of San Diego government employees should discuss this issue with your supervisor and departmental HR officer (DHRO).

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❖ *Where can the general public get hepatitis A vaccine? Does the County offer free hepatitis A vaccination for the general public? If so, where/when is it available?*

- During the current outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for the **at-risk populations** identified above and is not being recommended for the general public. If you are part of the **at-risk populations** groups and
 - If you are **INSURED**, please check with your occupational health provider, local health care provider or pharmacist. Call ahead to see if they have the vaccine and your local pharmacy accepts your insurance. If a pharmacy does not accept your insurance, call your health plan to find out what pharmacies they work with. The vaccination is covered as a pharmacy benefit for several insurance sources, including Medi-Cal fee for service and managed care, as well as several qualified health plans through Covered California.
 - Medi-Cal covers this vaccine without prior authorization.
 - If you are **uninsured**, please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org to find a community clinic or public health center to request the hepatitis A vaccine.

X. Tourism/Travel:

❖ *I plan to visit San Diego soon. Should I cancel? What precautions should I take while I am in San Diego? Should I be vaccinated before travel to San Diego?*

- No. Cancelling your trip is not necessary. As with traveling to any location, remember that germs are everywhere and that the best way to prevent illness is to wash your hands after touching objects around you. Always wash your hands before eating and after using the restroom or changing diapers. It is not necessary to obtain a hepatitis A vaccination prior to traveling to San Diego. Vaccine is recommended for **at-risk populations** including homeless persons and illegal drug users, and others who are in close contact with **at-risk populations**.

❖ *What is San Diego doing to protect visitors/tourists?*

- Tourists and visitors are not **at-risk populations** for getting hepatitis A. The County of San Diego is working with all municipalities and businesses to increase public access to bathrooms for the homeless, to ensure appropriate sanitation. As well, the general public is advised to practice good handwashing hygiene before eating and after using the restroom.
- From the San Diego Tourism Authority (SDTA), "The health and safety of visitors to San Diego is the highest priority for SDTA, our partners and the local tourism industry. As such, the San Diego Tourism Authority is committed to providing travelers with current, accurate information about traveling to the region safely. Traveling to San Diego is very safe. The current hepatitis A outbreak has primarily affected San Diego's homeless populations and/or illegal drug users. The County of San Diego and City of San Diego are currently taking steps to mitigate the spread of the illness, and the SDTA has confidence in the response efforts of our local authorities to combat the spread of this and any other infections."

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❖ *Does the San Diego Tourism Authority know anything about the hepatitis A outbreak?*

- The San Diego Tourism Authority is aware of the hepatitis A outbreak and “will work to assure concerned potential visitors that it is safe to travel to San Diego”.

❖ *Should I be vaccinated before traveling?*

- Anyone considering traveling to or working in countries with high numbers of hepatitis A infections should talk to a health professional about getting vaccinated. Visit www.cdc.gov/travel to see what precautions you should take before travelling to your specific destination. Hepatitis A is recommended for travel to countries in Central or South America, Mexico, and certain parts of Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. CDC’s Travelers’ Health site provides detailed information about hepatitis A and other recommended vaccines at www.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCH4-HepA.aspx.

❖ *Is the hepatitis A outbreak related to Mexico or due to San Diego County’s close proximity to the border?*

- The current hepatitis A outbreak is not related to its proximity to Mexico. The strain of hepatitis A in Mexico (1A) is different from the strain found in San Diego’s outbreak (1B) so there is no evidence or data to suggest the San Diego outbreak originated from Mexico. In addition, there have been no cases of hepatitis A during this outbreak associated with the Tijuana River Valley.

XI. **Sanitize (Cleaning):**

❖ *Where have hand-washing stations been placed?*

- The County is placing portable handwashing stations in the different jurisdictions (target areas) where there is a concentration of homeless people. A vendor who will be servicing the stations every day is placing the stations. The usage of stations is monitored and those with heavier usage will be serviced twice a day. An up-to-date map on the 2-1-1 website can be found [here](#).

❖ *What is being done to sanitize the sidewalks and public right-of-ways?*

- Under the local health emergency, direction has been given to sanitize areas where significant numbers of homeless persons are living. Sanitation may help decrease hepatitis A virus in these environments. These actions may lower the likelihood of the hepatitis A virus infection spreading.

❖ *Who will be sanitizing the sidewalks and public right-of-ways?*

- The sidewalk and public right-of-ways sanitization is the responsibility of the jurisdiction (target areas).

❖ *What other sanitation efforts are happening?*

- Hygiene kits are being assembled and distributed to partners. The kits contain water, non-alcohol hand sanitizer, cleaning wipes, clinic information, hepatitis A information and plastic

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bags. Some public restrooms are now open 24 hours/7 days a week and portable toilets installed.

❖ ***Are hand sanitizers effective against hepatitis A? How do hand sanitizers compare with hand washing?***

No.

- Washing hands with soap and water is recommended when possible, as it is more effective than hand sanitizers are.
- Most alcohol-based hand sanitizers are effective against bacteria, but they do not do so well against viruses like the hepatitis viruses, mainly hepatitis A, or norovirus. A non-alcohol based hand sanitizer is most effective against these viruses.

❖ ***How do I decontaminate library books?***

- You do not need to decontaminate (clean) library books. However, please wash your hands with soap and water after reading if a book seems dusty or dirty.

❖ ***I see many homeless people use my gym for the bathroom and shower. I have seen them spit all over the place too. What is the gym doing to protect me?***

- Businesses should download and implement the [disinfection guidelines](#) (also available in other languages [here](#)) and remind clients to wash hands and maintain proper hygiene. Those who patron these facilities should always remember to maintain proper hand hygiene, clean equipment before and after using it, and wash your hands before eating and after using the bathroom.

❖ ***How should I disinfect my home or business for hepatitis A?***

- Maintain routine and consistent cleaning of bathrooms for employees, public, and personal use. Use a chlorine-based disinfectant (bleach) with a ratio of 1 and 2/3 cup of bleach to one gallon of water (5,000 ppm). Mix and use the chlorine solution promptly.³ Allow 1 minute of contact time. Due to the high bleach concentration of this mixture, rinse surfaces with water after 1 minute of contact time and wear gloves while cleaning. Use for stainless steel, food/mouth contact items, tile floors, nonporous surfaces, counters, sinks and toilets. The County Department of Environmental Health has developed [disinfection guidelines](#), which can be found here on the [County hepatitis A webpage](#) (also available in other languages).

³ Product names can be searched in the California Department of Pesticide Regulation registered product database at: <http://cdpr.ca.gov/docs/label/labelque.htm>. Additionally, questions on product labels can be directed to County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures Pesticide Regulation Program at (858) 694-8980.



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❖ *What should I do if I observe (what I believe to be) human feces in a public area?*

- Contact the Code Enforcement program for your city to report this activity.

Jurisdiction	Phone Number	Jurisdiction	Phone Number
Carlsbad	760-602-2703	Oceanside	760-435-3520
Chula Vista	619-691-5280	Poway	858-668-4663
Coronado	619-522-2411	San Diego	619-236-5500
Del Mar	858-755-9313	San Marcos	760-744-1050
El Cajon	619-441-1716	Santee	619-258-4100
Encinitas	760-633-2685	Solana Beach	858-720-2413
Escondido	760-839-4650	Vista	760-639-6141
Imperial Beach	619-628-1358	Unincorporated County	(858) 694-2705
La Mesa	619-667-1177		
Lemon Grove	619-825-3820		
National City	619-336-4364		

❖ *What to do if you come across human waste on your property you suspect came from the at-risk populations?*

- Cleaning up human waste on private property is the responsibility of the property owner. The recommended precautions to take are, any person handling feces or other bodily fluids should always wear gloves. Clean up visible debris using disposable absorbent material (paper towels or other type of disposal cloth) or with an instrument such as a shovel. Spray feces and soiled items with a disinfectant approved for hepatitis A.³ Discard feces/soiled items carefully in a plastic bag seal it and discard it in the trash. Disinfect the area and any instruments used in the removal. Application of a disinfectant must be per the product label requirements. Do not wash the area with a hose and allow the water to go into a storm drain. Gloves should be discarded in a sealed plastic bag and placed into trash.
- There are also local clean up companies that offer these services. They can be found in phone directories or through an internet search.

❖ *Has the plastic bag bans in local cities contributed to the hepatitis A outbreak?*

- There is NO ASSOCIATION between the hepatitis A outbreak and the plastic bag ban. The ban occurred in other jurisdictions (target areas) of the state and there were no hepatitis A cases there.

❖ *Can I get hepatitis A from breathing infected air?*

- No. hepatitis A is not an airborne virus. Hepatitis A is primarily transmitted by the fecal-oral route.

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XII. **Water:**

❖ ***Is tap water safe to drink?***

- Yes, tap water is safe to drink as hepatitis A is killed by disinfection treatment of the water before being delivered by pipes to faucets and taps at homes, businesses and parks. However, be cautious of sharing water with others and drinking after others, or people who might have the hepatitis A virus infection.

❖ ***Should I be concerned of getting hepatitis A from swimming or being in the ocean?***

- No, the current outbreak has primarily spread via close person-to-person transmission, not transmission via a water source.
- Any material that is contaminated with hepatitis A virus, including human feces, that enters the river could potentially be transmitted downriver, though significant dilution would occur in transit. The specific risk to individuals downstream from this runoff is unknown, but would be expected to be very low. Swimmers and surfers should continue to recreate but still pay attention to localized beach advisory or closure signs when posted by the Department of Environmental Health. This occurs when routine ocean water sampling indicates that fecal bacteria levels exceed safe swimming standards set by the State Department of Public Health at that beach location.

❖ ***Can I get hepatitis A from a water source?***

- The hepatitis A virus is transmitted primarily by the fecal-oral route; that is when an uninfected person ingests the virus after touching objects contaminated with the feces of an infected person or eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water. Waterborne outbreaks are infrequent especially in developed countries with well-maintained sanitation and water supplies. They are usually associated with sewage-contaminated or inadequately treated water. In the United States, disinfection treatment of water kills hepatitis A virus before it can enter the drinking water supply.

❖ ***Are there any cases of hepatitis A in the Tijuana River Valley?***

- There has been no hepatitis A cases reported in the current outbreak related to the Tijuana River Valley. Hepatitis A should not be a concern for individuals who enjoy the beaches and enter the ocean in San Diego County. The current outbreak has primarily spread via close person-to-person transmission, not transmission via a water source.

❖ ***Are there any cases of hepatitis A along the San Diego River?***

- While there have been some cases of hepatitis A among individuals who have spent time along the San Diego River, there is no evidence that any of them were infected from the river. Several hepatitis A vaccination efforts have been conducted along the San Diego River and respective jurisdictions (target areas) have enhanced their clean-up efforts as well.

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XIII. If I Need More Help:

❖ *What should I do about homeless people living near my residence or place of business?*

- If you want to help and provide resources to someone experiencing homelessness, then please call 2-1-1 to find out the nearest shelter or community organization that can provide them with assistance.
- If a person experiencing homelessness is causing a disturbance or problem near your residence or business, please call your local law enforcement for assistance.

❖ *I am worried about contact to hepatitis A (I live downtown, live near homeless people, etc.). What should I do to prevent contact to hepatitis A?*

- Hepatitis A is fecal oral disease, meaning the virus has to be ingested after contact with contaminated objects, food or sex. Washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before eating, after using bathrooms, and preparing food should protect individuals.
- In this situation, your risk is low; if you think, you have been exposed vaccination and good hand hygiene is the best tools to protect yourself. The vaccine is NOT currently recommended for the general public, as proper hand hygiene is adequate for most individuals.

❖ *Our organization would like a presentation about hepatitis A. Whom should we contact?*

- To request a County staff to come to your organization to give a hepatitis A presentation, please contact 2-1-1 San Diego.

❖ *What if I need additional assistance?*

- If additional assistance is needed, please contact your healthcare provider, occupational health provider, or call 2-1-1 or visit 2-1-1sandiego.org

❖ *What should I do if I observe (what I believe to be) human feces in a public area?*

- Contact the Code Enforcement program for your city to report this activity.

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