



County of Erie

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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HEALTH ADVISORY #294

July 9, 2012

Potential Exposure to Hepatitis A Virus at a Niagara County Food Establishment

Please distribute to the Infection Control Department, Emergency Department, Employee Health Service, Infectious Disease Department, Director of Nursing, Medical Director, Laboratory Service, and all patient care areas.

SUMMARY OF THE INVESTIGATION

The Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH), in consultation with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is investigating a confirmed case of acute hepatitis A in an individual associated with a food service establishment in Niagara Falls, NY. The food handler was considered to be infectious from June 5th-June 28, 2012. Secondary cases could be expected from June 20th (15 days out for earliest incubation) to August 17th (50 days from last day of infectious period). The NCDOH Divisions of Epidemiology and Environmental Health conducted joint on-site investigations to evaluate the level of risk to other workers and the public. The investigators have confirmed the affected worker complied with all public health food-handling protocols and procedures for hand-washing and use of gloves. Recent inspections conducted and documented by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets are consistent with observations made during the NCDOH onsite investigation. NCDOH and NYSDOH public health officials are working closely with the owner and staff of the food establishment to monitor the situation to avoid the potential for additional cases of hepatitis A. Based on the information collected in this investigation, the risk to the community for acquiring Hepatitis A from this event is deemed extremely low. There are no plans to offer post-exposure prophylaxis to the public.

NCDOH is asking providers to consider hepatitis A infection when evaluating any patient with jaundice, with or without abdominal pain, fever, nausea, and/or diarrhea. Hepatitis A infection should also be considered for persons without jaundice who present with abdominal pain, fever, nausea, and /or diarrhea. Providers should report suspected and confirmed cases of hepatitis A promptly to the local health department (LHD) where the patient resides. Suspected cases of hepatitis A in food workers should be reported immediately by telephone.

BACKGROUND ON HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis A is caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV) that can be shed in the stool of infected persons. The virus may be spread when a person consumes food or drink that has been handled by an infected person. It may also be spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. **Casual contact does not spread the virus.**

Signs and symptoms of hepatitis A may range from mild to severe and include an abrupt onset of fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark-colored urine, clay-colored stool, joint pain, diarrhea and jaundice. Signs and symptoms commonly appear within 28 days of exposure, with a range of 15–50 days. The disease is rarely fatal and most people recover completely in a few weeks with full HAV immunity and no complications. HAV can rarely cause liver failure and death, usually in people over fifty years of age and in persons with other liver diseases, such as alcohol-induced cirrhosis, hepatitis B or C. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A except for supportive treatment to ease symptoms. Thorough and vigorous hand-washing for at least twenty seconds with pump soap and rinsing under running water, followed by drying with clean disposable towels after bathroom use, as well as before, during, and after food preparation is the most important means to prevent the spread of HAV and other intestinal illnesses. Sharing food and utensils should be discouraged especially whenever anyone is ill.

REPORTING AND TESTING

NCDOH is asking providers to consider hepatitis A infection when evaluating any patient with jaundice with or without abdominal pain, fever, nausea, and/or diarrhea. Hepatitis A infection should also be considered for persons without jaundice who present with abdominal pain, fever, nausea, and/or diarrhea. Providers should report suspected and confirmed cases of hepatitis A promptly to the LHD where the patient resides. Suspected cases of hepatitis A in a food worker should be reported immediately by telephone.

For persons with signs and symptoms, physicians should order serologic tests for HAV (total and IgM anti-HAV antibody, available commercially), along with standard liver function tests (ALT/AST). Because of the possibility of false positive results, serologic tests for HAV should not be used to identify infection in those who may have been exposed but have no signs or symptoms. However, for exposed individuals under the age of 6 years with milder symptoms, especially those in daycare or school settings, testing should be considered. Positive total anti-HAV and negative IgM anti-HAV indicates past infection or vaccination and immunity.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on hepatitis A is available on the NYSDOH web site at:
<http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/hepatitis/havinfo.htm>

CONTACT INFORMATION

Providers with questions or concerns may contact the Erie County Department of Health's Epidemiology and Surveillance program at (716) 858-7697, Monday – Friday 8:00 AM – 3:30 PM.

Health Category Definitions:

Health Alert FLASH: conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

Health Alert Priority: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary

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