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Health department launches campaign to fight hepatitis A

LANSING, Mich. – A hepatitis A outbreak that began in Metro Detroit more than 18 months ago continues to affect communities across Michigan, including Ingham County. In response, the Ingham County Health Department has launched a public education campaign to fight the contagious liver disease.

The campaign encourages people to: identify the symptoms, know their level of risk for infection, and take action to prevent hepatitis A. The campaign includes billboards, newspaper ads, a text for information campaign, an online quiz to assess risk, and social media.

“Anyone can get hepatitis A, but some people are at greater risk in this outbreak,” said Ingham County Health Officer Linda S. Vail. “We want those at high risk to get vaccinated, but everyone should be aware of hepatitis A and take care to prevent it by properly washing their hands.”

To date, 26 people have been infected in Ingham County. One has died. Across the state more than 800 people have been infected with 25 deaths. The outbreak is expected to continue for many more months.

Hepatitis A is often spread through the ingestion of food or water contaminated with infected feces (poop) or oral contact with contaminated objects. Transmission can occur easily among household contacts and sexual partners. Those at high risk include: people who are homeless or use transient housing, people who use illicit drugs, people who were recently incarcerated, and men who have sex with men.

The health department is vaccinating people who are at high risk at no cost. Vaccines are available at outreach clinics scheduled around the community and at the health department. People who identify as high risk, can present the code “Campaign18” to the health department’s Immunization Clinic to receive the vaccine at no cost.

Illness generally occurs two to six weeks after exposure to the hepatitis A virus and includes fatigue, fever, stomach pain, nausea and vomiting, yellow skin and eyes, dark urine and pale stool. Hepatitis A can range from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious illness lasting several months. Some people have no symptoms. Vaccination and thorough hand washing can prevent infection.

For more information or to be vaccinated, people should contact their health care provider or the Ingham County Health Department’s Immunization Clinic at (517) 887-4316. They may also visit the health department’s website at hd.ingham.org or text “HEP” to 41411.

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