

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Vaccination Urged for Ohioans at Risk for Hepatitis A**

### *Cases of preventable liver disease on the rise in Ohio*

COLUMBUS – After an increase this year in hepatitis A cases linked to certain risk factors, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is encouraging people with known risk factors to get vaccinated. So far in 2018, there have been 47 cases of hepatitis A across the state, compared to five cases during the same timeframe last year.

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable liver disease that usually spreads when a person ingests fecal matter—even in microscopic amounts—from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by the stool of an infected person. Hepatitis A also can spread from close personal contact with an infected person, such as through sex.

People at increased risk for hepatitis A include those with direct contact with individuals infected with the virus; travelers to countries where the virus is prevalent; men who have sex with men; people who use street drugs whether they are injected or not; people with blood clotting factor disorders; people with chronic liver disease; and household members and other close contacts of adopted children newly arrived from countries where hepatitis A is common.

“The best way to prevent hepatitis A among high-risk individuals is to get vaccinated,” said ODH Medical Director Dr. Clint Koenig. “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the hepatitis A vaccine for all children at age 1 and for at-risk individuals.”

Symptoms of hepatitis A include fatigue, low appetite, stomach pain, nausea, clay-colored stools and jaundice. People with hepatitis A can experience mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months.

Ohio has not seen a hepatitis A outbreak so far, which requires at least two cases to be linked to a common exposure source. However, outbreaks are occurring in several states across the U.S., including in neighboring states of Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan and West Virginia. Some of Ohio’s hepatitis A cases are linked to these outbreaks.

Individuals who believe that they are at high risk for hepatitis A should contact their healthcare provider or local health department for information about vaccination. People who know that they have been exposed to someone with hepatitis A should contact their healthcare provider or local health department to discuss post-exposure vaccination options. Individuals who experience symptoms of hepatitis A should contact their healthcare provider.

ODH has sent a health alert to all local health departments across the state with guidance on investigating hepatitis A cases and identifying high-risk groups for vaccination. ODH also is helping local health departments secure hepatitis A vaccines for high-risk populations.

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