



**Commonwealth of Kentucky  
Cabinet for Health and Family Services**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Public Health Continues to Promote Hepatitis A  
Vaccination**

*Statewide Outbreak Continues, More Deaths Reported*

**FRANKFORT, Ky.** (Feb. 8, 2019) – People who are considered high risk for exposure to the Hepatitis A virus should get vaccinated as soon as possible to avoid contracting the virus and lessen the spread of the disease. High risk groups include individuals who use illicit drugs, close contacts of illicit drug users, and homeless people.

The Department for Public Health (DPH) is making this recommendation as part of its efforts to respond to the ongoing outbreak of Hepatitis A. Since the outbreak began in August 2017, reported cases continue to rise and have now been recorded in 103 of Kentucky's 120 counties.

"If you are at-risk of exposure to the Hepatitis A virus, we urge to get vaccinated immediately. Immunizations can be obtained from a healthcare provider, pharmacies, and clinics throughout the state. Local health departments have limited vaccine supply for at-risk individuals who are uninsured," said DPH Commissioner Dr. Jeff Howard. "In addition, if you live in a county currently experiencing an outbreak, we also urge you to

be vaccinated for Hepatitis A as well as continue to practice regular and thorough hand washing, particularly if you are engaging with any of the high risk groups.”

About 80 percent of cases in the current outbreak are people in the high risk groups.

Other priority populations include;

- People with direct contact with someone who has Hepatitis A (particularly during their infectious period);
- Men who have sexual contact with men; and
- People who are at increased risk of complications from Hepatitis A (e.g., people with chronic liver disease).

As of Jan. 26, 3,819 cases have been reported in Kentucky due to the outbreak. A recent year-end review of Kentucky mortality records revealed additional deaths, increasing the total known deaths to 40 associated with the current Hepatitis A outbreak. Counties have reported 1,862 hospitalizations due to Hepatitis A.

To date, 80 counties have reported five or more cases, meaning they meet the threshold for what is considered an outbreak of Hepatitis A virus. Boyd, Carter, Fayette, Floyd, Jefferson, Kenton, Laurel, Madison, and Whitley counties report 100 or more cases associated with the outbreak.

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable disease of the liver, which causes inflammation of the liver and affects the organ’s ability to function. Signs and symptoms of Hepatitis A include nausea, diarrhea, and loss of appetite, fever, fatigue, jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes), clay-colored bowel movements, dark-colored urine, and abdominal discomfort. Signs and symptoms usually appear 2-4 weeks after exposure, but may occur up to 7 weeks after exposure. Children under 6 years of age with Hepatitis A often show few signs and symptoms.

Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of infected people, and is usually spread person-to-person when infected people do not properly wash their hands or do not have access to proper sanitation. Transmission typically occurs when a person ingests infected fecal matter, even in microscopic amounts, from contact with contaminated objects, food, or drinks. DPH recommends frequent hand washing, particularly after using the restroom,

or before eating, to prevent transmission of hepatitis A and many other common diseases.

To prevent new cases from occurring, DPH has partnered with local public health staff, health care providers, correctional facilities, faith-based organizations, homeless shelters, and substance abuse treatment centers to vaccinate people who are at the highest risk of getting Hepatitis A. People who have had Hepatitis A disease or previously received 2 doses of the Hepatitis A vaccine do not need to be immunized.

“Vaccination of high risk groups is crucial to stopping the outbreak in Kentucky,” added Dr. Howard. “If you or someone you know might be at risk for Hepatitis A, please get vaccinated as soon as possible at your local health department, primary care physician’s office, or local pharmacy. If you suspect you might have Hepatitis A infection or are experiencing symptoms (including, vomiting, diarrhea, jaundice/yellowing of the skin and eyes), you should seek medical care immediately.”

Individuals also are advised to contact their local health department or the Reportable Disease program at DPH at (502) 564-3261.

Since 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that all children receive the Hepatitis A vaccine series. DPH recommends children aged 1 to 18 years receive the two-dose Hepatitis A vaccine, as well as at-risk adults. Kentucky now requires all students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade to have two doses of the Hepatitis A vaccine in order to attend school or receive a provisional certificate of immunization.

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*The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies*

*in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.*