



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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Nurse strike teams providing Hepatitis A vaccines at  
jails, other facilities for at-risk population**

**FRANKFORT, Ky.** (July 12, 2019) – The Kentucky Department for Public Health, within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, has deployed a strike team of nurses to administer Hepatitis A vaccines at jails and other locations.

Since April, the team has provided more than 2,100 vaccines at 40 different sites across the Commonwealth, at facilities including county jails, probation and parole offices, homeless shelters, treatment centers, and pharmacies.

The state is collaborating with local partners on harm reduction programs, aimed at reaching those who are most at risk.

At least 18 additional vaccination events are scheduled through August, including Friday's visit to the Fayette County Detention Center.

"We are grateful for the dedication of the nurses who are members of our strike team," said Dr. Jeffrey Howard, Commissioner of the Department for Public Health. "Their

dedication to ensuring the at-risk population receive preventive vaccination is paramount to our overall response to this outbreak."

The Department for Public Health identified an outbreak of acute Hepatitis A in November 2017. Since then, the total number of cases has exceeded 4,700, with nearly half of them requiring hospitalization. And 58 deaths have been linked to Hepatitis A within the commonwealth.

The outbreak began in Jefferson County, yet Kentucky was the first state to experience a large, rural spread of the disease.

"We have found it particularly challenging to reach the at-risk population in rural Kentucky," Dr. Howard said. "One reason is the stigma associated with substance use disorder (SUD)."

"In some of our rural communities, more than 80% of hepatitis A cases have occurred in those with SUD," he added. "Due to the stigma surrounding SUD, the at-risk population is often hesitant to seek preventative care."

Similar to outbreaks in other states, the primary risk factors have been illicit drug use and homelessness. A contaminated food source has not been identified, and transmission of the virus is believed to have occurred through person-to-person contact.

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver infection. A doctor can determine if a person has contracted Hepatitis A by discussing his or her symptoms and taking a blood sample.

The Department for Public Health estimates more than 361,500 adults have received the vaccine since November 2017 in Kentucky.

More than \$4.5 million in state and federal funding has been allocated towards the response effort.

Additional information is available at <http://chfs.ky.gov/>.

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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.*