



MEDIA RELEASE

KNOX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KCHD sees increase in Hepatitis A cases

Urges those at risk to get vaccinated

Knoxville, Tenn. — The Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is seeing a rise in hepatitis A cases related to the ongoing statewide outbreak. While KCHD has been investigating hepatitis A cases related to the outbreak since July 2018, the rate at which new cases are being reported has accelerated recently. From July 2018 to February 2019, a total of 10 cases were reported. Since March 1, an additional nine cases have been reported, an increase of 90 percent, bringing the total, as of this release, to 19 cases.

“The current outbreak continues to predominately affect middle Tennessee and many of the east Tennessee communities surrounding Knox County,” said KCHD Director Dr. Martha Buchanan. “While Knox County has not experienced the high number of cases other areas have, it’s important that we, as a community, do everything we can to prevent our recent uptick from ballooning.”

Tennessee’s hepatitis A outbreak is linked to a large, multi-state outbreak that began in 2017. Knox County’s outbreak is primarily affecting those who use injection and non-injection drugs, such as marijuana, heroin and methamphetamine; those experiencing homelessness; and the close contacts of both groups.

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable, communicable disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus. It is highly transmissible from person-to-person through the fecal-oral route. Transmission usually occurs when a person who has the infection does not wash their hands after using the bathroom and then touches food, a surface or another person's mouth. A person with hepatitis A may be contagious before their symptoms begin and even after they are well. Hepatitis A virus is more common in areas that lack adequate sanitation or have poor hygiene practices. Most people who acquire the illness have had direct personal contact with an infected person. Symptoms can include vomiting, diarrhea, dark urine, fever, fatigue, abdominal pain, jaundice and a loss of appetite.

“Unfortunately, most of us know someone who is battling substance misuse, so we need the community to get involved, to use their voice to encourage their friends and family who may be in a high-risk group to get vaccinated,” added Buchanan.

Hepatitis A vaccinations are available at [all three KCHD locations](#) at no cost for those in the high-risk groups. Appointments are recommended by calling 865-215-5070.



For most adults, hepatitis A usually resolves within two months of infection. However, it can be serious and even deadly, especially for those in high-risk groups. Sixty-two percent of the cases in Tennessee's current outbreak have required hospitalization, and six patients have died.

“Our staff have been diligently working with other medical providers and partners in the community to provide education and increase vaccination, and we will continue to do all that we can, but we also need the public's support by encouraging those in high-risk groups to get vaccinated, whether that's a friend or family member or someone with whom they work,” said Buchanan.

Since the outbreak began last year, KCHD has provided more than 1,600 vaccinations through outreach and outbreak-related events. More information about hepatitis A and the statewide outbreak is available on the Tennessee Department of Health's website: <https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/tennessee-hepatitis-a-outbreak.html>.

About Knox County Health Department

As the first health department in Tennessee to achieve national accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board, the Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is dedicated to ensuring the conditions in which every resident can be healthy. KCHD investigates disease outbreaks, identifies community health threats, conducts extensive outreach and education, provides and connects the public with medical care, prepares for public health emergencies, enforces food safety and air quality laws, and more. For more information, visit www.knoxcounty.org/health.

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