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County Health Officials Urge Residents to Get Vaccinated as Hepatitis A Cases Increase

ELKTON, MD. - Cecil County Health Department is urging residents to ask their health care providers about receiving hepatitis A vaccine, as cases of the illness increase rapidly in Cecil County.

The Cecil County Health Department is working with the Maryland Department of Health and other partners to investigate a rapid increase in hepatitis A cases among Cecil County residents. Since December 1, 2019, 21 confirmed cases of hepatitis A have been reported in Cecil County, with 11 so far in January. Prior to this uptick, Cecil County has recorded only 1 or 2 cases each month. Several additional reports are currently under investigation. Most people who became ill report illicit drug use.

Over the last several years, there has been a national increase in hepatitis A cases. Large outbreaks in 30 states, including neighboring Pennsylvania, have been linked to more than 30,000 cases and more than 300 deaths since 2016. The majority of these cases are among people who report using illicit drugs, people experiencing homelessness, people who were recently incarcerated, men who have sex with men, and people with chronic liver disease.

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. Common symptoms of hepatitis A virus infection include:
- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Brown, tea-colored urine
- Diarrhea or light-colored stool
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Stomach pain
- Nausea

Hepatitis A usually spreads when someone eats or drinks food, water or objects that have been contaminated with small, undetected amounts of stool from an infected person. The virus can also spread from close personal contact with an infected person such as through sex or caring for someone who is ill. Symptoms usually appear within 28 days of exposure, and can last for several weeks to months. If you believe you might have a hepatitis A infection or were recently
exposed to hepatitis A, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

The most effective way for Cecil County residents to protect themselves against hepatitis A infection is to get vaccinated. However, hepatitis A vaccine only became routine for all children in 2006, and many adults were not vaccinated when they were children. “The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective, even after a single dose. For better and longer-lasting protection a second dose is recommended six months after the first” says Dr. Henry Taylor, Cecil County Health Department’s Deputy Health Officer-Clinical. “Anyone who wants to protect themselves from the disease should talk to their health care provider about being vaccinated.”

Free hepatitis A vaccine is also being offered by the Cecil County Health Department for high risk groups, including:

- People who use drugs
- People experiencing homelessness
- People who were recently incarcerated
- Men who have sex with men

To find out if you are eligible for free hepatitis A vaccine, please call 410-996-5100. For more information about hepatitis A, visit [https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm).

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The **Cecil County Health Department**, in partnership with the community, strives to improve the health of Cecil County and its residents by providing leadership to find solutions to our health problems through assessment, policy development and assurance of quality health services and education.