

NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health officials warn of Hepatitis A outbreak in southern Idaho

Public health officials are investigating an outbreak of hepatitis A in southern Idaho. Twelve people infected with hepatitis A virus have been reported to public health officials since Jan. 1, 2019. In 2018, only eight people were reported with hepatitis A in Idaho. Epidemiologists are working to determine possible links between the cases and are encouraging people in high-risk populations to get vaccinated.

Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for people who might be at increased risk of being exposed to the virus, including:

- Men who have sex with men
- People who use drugs (injection or non-injection)
- People experiencing unstable housing or homelessness
- People with chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C

“We’re monitoring the situation closely,” said epidemiologist Randi Pedersen. “The best protection is to be vaccinated, but everyone can reduce their risk by practicing good hand hygiene. This means thoroughly washing your hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food.”

"Hepatitis A can spread quickly, and we take all cases very seriously," said Tanis Maxwell, SCPHD Epidemiologist. "The cases in our region are limited to three individuals that SCPHD is monitoring closely. Despite thorough investigation, we haven't found a common source and believe the cases in our district are unrelated."

Hepatitis A is a virus that infects the liver and is easily spread by poor hand washing, close contact or sex with an infected person, eating or drinking contaminated food, and recreational drug use.

“Most Idahoans reported with hepatitis A this year have been so severely ill, they were hospitalized,” Pedersen said.

Hepatitis A can be prevented by being vaccinated, and also by washing hands with soap and water after using the bathroom and before eating or preparing food. Symptoms start 2-7 weeks after infection and can include yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), fever, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, tiredness, lack of appetite, and dark urine or pale stool.

Hepatitis A vaccine has been routinely recommended for children since 1999. However, there are many Idahoans over the age of 30 who were not vaccinated as a child and are susceptible to hepatitis A. Lack of immunity among Idahoans over the age of 30 may be playing a role in the current outbreak in Idaho.

For more information about hepatitis A and getting vaccinated, talk to your healthcare provider or local public health district.

- Find your local public health district at <http://www.idahopublichealthdistricts.org/>
- Hepatitis A Facts at <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis>

Number of Hepatitis A Infections in Southern Idaho since Jan. 1, 2019

Idaho Public Health District	Number of Reported Hepatitis A Infections	Counties with Reported Hepatitis A Infections
Public Health District 3	2	Canyon
Public Health District 4	7	Ada, Elmore
Public Health District 5	3	Blaine, Twin Falls