For Immediate Release

MCHD encourages Hepatitis A vaccines in light of recent cases

MORGANTOWN, WV (Nov. 1, 2019) — Following the recent hospitalization for Hepatitis A of a second area resident, Monongalia County Health Department wants to encourage community members to consider getting vaccinated to prevent this illness.

“Hepatitis A is a viral infection for which there is a very effective vaccine,” said Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer.

Hepatitis A vaccine is a two-shot series. The first vaccine provides 95% prevention against the disease; the second one, administered about six months later, gives an individual lifetime immunity.

This second case does not involve anyone connected with the food industry, as the one announced last week did. However, “Hepatitis A is present in our environment,” Dr. Smith said. “And it’s a vaccine-preventable disease.”

There is currently a multi-state Hepatitis A outbreak that in West Virginia has been concentrated largely in Cabell and Kanawha counties since March 2018.

As of Oct. 15, there have been a reported 2,577 cases of Hepatitis A in West Virginia. Because this outbreak involves a high number of individuals who are homeless and/or drug users, there is a higher-than-usual hospitalization rate of 50 percent. Twenty-three people have died.

Of those West Virginia Hepatitis A cases, 55% also have co-infection with Hepatitis C and 10 percent are co-infected with Hepatitis B. Those co-infections are part of the reason why hospitalization rates for this Hepatitis A outbreak is so high. Nearly 69% of individuals in this outbreak reported drug use and 9% are homeless.
Hepatitis A is an inflammation of the liver. It is spread through fecal-oral contact. In addition to receiving the Hepatitis A vaccine, good handwashing techniques with warm or hot water and soap for at least 30 seconds at all times, including after using the bathroom and also before preparing food, are recommended to avoid spread of the illness.

Hepatitis B also is vaccine-preventable, but like Hepatitis A, there is no cure. There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C, which can be treated and cured. However, most people who get Hepatitis A do recover; it does not turn into a chronic condition like Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C can.

Symptoms of Hepatitis A may be any combination of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, low-grade fever, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, muscle and joint aches, dark urine, weight loss and jaundice.

Anyone who becomes ill or exhibits some of these symptoms should contact a health care provider.

Anyone working as a food handler who experiences Hepatitis A symptoms should not work and should be seen by a health care provider.

“While some Hepatitis A symptoms are vague and flu-like, jaundice, which gives a person yellow skin and/or eyes, is much more specific symptom of Hepatitis,” Dr. Smith said.

Hepatitis A vaccines are available at MCHD Clinical Services. To make an appointment for a vaccine, call 304-598-5119.

Check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd for up-to-date information on health and wellness in the community, including breaking news on any more Hepatitis cases should they arise.