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## Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez and Florida Surgeon General Scott A. Rivkees Confirm CDC to Partner in Hepatitis A Outbreak Response

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**Tallahassee, Fla.** — At Governor Ron DeSantis' direction, Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez and Florida Surgeon General Scott A. Rivkees announced that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Florida Department of Health (FDOH) are partnering to control the current rise in Hepatitis A cases throughout the state.

The new partnership with the CDC demonstrates a commitment to expanding the robust response that FDOH is taking to control and prevent the spread of Hepatitis A. Lieutenant Governor Nuñez and Surgeon General Rivkees are mobilizing additional resources, including vaccines and manpower, to combat this issue head-on.

"The rise of Hepatitis A cases in Florida is an issue that Governor DeSantis and I are fully focused on," **said Lt. Governor Jeanette Nuñez.** "We are working closely with Surgeon General Rivkees on this important issue and support his action to expand our response and work with our federal partners. This collaboration with the CDC will increase our vaccination outreach to protect more Floridians from this preventable disease and more aggressively promote awareness on how they can protect themselves and their loved ones."

"As Surgeon General, I am committed to the health of all residents and visitors of our great state," **said Florida Surgeon General Scott A. Rivkees.** "We will use every tool at our disposal to stop the spread of Hepatitis A in Florida and I welcome the partnership and collaboration with our federal partners at the CDC to assist in this important mission. We will work together to take bold, innovative steps to drastically increase outreach and vaccination to protect the people of Florida."

Since January 2019, 1718 cases of Hepatitis A have been reported in Florida. This increase in cases reflects national trends, with more than 20,000 cases identified nationwide. Local and state health departments across the country have worked closely with the CDC to respond to similar outbreaks since March 2017.

### About Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the Hepatitis A virus and prevented with the Hepatitis A vaccine. The Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of people who are infected and can survive on surfaces for several months. When hearing about Hepatitis A, many people think of contaminated food or water. That is one way the virus can spread and a common way that international travelers get infected. However, most people don't know that in the United States,

and in Florida, Hepatitis A is more commonly spread from person to person, which is how people are getting infected in the current outbreaks.

Infection can occur when someone ingests the virus, usually through close personal contact with an infected person. Hepatitis A is very contagious, and people can spread the virus before they get symptoms such as nausea, stomach pain, and yellow skin or eyes. People who get hepatitis A may feel sick for a few weeks to several months. While most people recover and do not have lasting liver damage, some people need to be hospitalized and even die. People with chronic liver or kidney disease or a compromised immune system are more likely to experience severe illness, leading to liver failure and possible death.

While Hepatitis A can affect anyone, certain groups are at greater risk of being infected in these outbreaks. To help stop the outbreaks, CDC recommends the Hepatitis A vaccine for people who use drugs (including drugs that are not injected), people experiencing homelessness, men who have sex with men, people with liver disease, and people who are or were recently in jail or prison.

### **Preventing Hepatitis A**

Getting vaccinated against Hepatitis A is the cornerstone of controlling the outbreak. Hepatitis A is easily prevented with a safe and effective vaccine that has been recommended since 2006 for all children at age one. This means, however, that many adults did not get the Hepatitis A vaccine as a child and therefore are not protected against the disease.

To help stop the outbreaks, the CDC recommends the Hepatitis A vaccine for people who use drugs (including drugs that are not injected), people experiencing homelessness, men who have sex with men, people with liver disease, and people who are or were recently in jail or prison. The vaccine is recommended for [adults at risk](#), including groups affected in these outbreaks, as well as travelers to certain international countries.

Persons at risk of hepatitis infection who have not been vaccinated or do not know their vaccination status should speak to their health care provider or contact their local county health department.

The symptoms of Hepatitis A include: fever, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), tiredness, loss of appetite, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, diarrhea, and gray clay-colored stool. Those with symptoms of Hepatitis A should visit their health care provider for evaluation.

Practicing good hand hygiene also plays an important role in preventing the spread of Hepatitis A.

Make sure to wash hands after using the bathroom — alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not kill the Hepatitis A virus. Use soap and running water and wash for at least 20 seconds, wash hands after changing a diaper or caring for person, and wash hands before preparing, serving or eating food.

### **How Hepatitis A is Investigated by the Department of Health**

After a case of Hepatitis A has been reported to the FDOH by a health care provider, a county health department (CHD) epidemiologist will interview the individual and collect information

regarding the timeline of their previous 50 days, including travel, occupation, drug use, food history and more. The epidemiologist will then identify close contacts of the ill person. If given within 14 days, the Hepatitis A vaccine will help prevent infection among anyone exposed to the virus. As with the national outbreak, the majority of cases of Hepatitis A in Florida are close contacts of persons experiencing homelessness or persons who use or inject drugs. Less than 5% of cases have been identified among food workers. To date, FDOH has not identified a case of hepatitis A transmission from a food worker to a restaurant patron.

## **For More Information**

For any questions or concerns about Hepatitis A, residents and visitors can call 1-844-CALL-DOH ([844\) 225-5364](tel:844-225-5364)), or email [hepa@flhealth.gov](mailto:hepa@flhealth.gov).

The Florida Department of Health has published a webpage, [www.floridahealth.gov/hepa](http://www.floridahealth.gov/hepa) to educate Floridians on Hepatitis A prevention and the steps everyone should take to prevent the spread of infection.

## **Educational Resources**

[Fact Sheet for the Public](#)

[Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable form of infectious hepatitis](#)

[Information for Healthcare Providers](#)

[Hepatitis A Virus \(HAV\) Alert for Health Care Providers](#)

[Hepatitis A Questions and Answers for Health Professionals](#)

[Information for Food Service Workers](#)

[Hepatitis A Virus Alert for Food Workers](#)

[Foodborne Disease Information](#)

## **About the Florida Department of Health**

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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