

April 12, 2019



# Florida Department of Health Officials Stress Importance of Awareness and Prevention of Hepatitis A

## Contact:

Communications Office

[NewsMedia@flhealth.gov](mailto:NewsMedia@flhealth.gov)

[\(850\) 245-4111](tel:(850)245-4111)

**Stuart, Fla.** — Today, officials from the Florida Department of Health (DOH) in Tallahassee and Martin County (DOH–Martin) joined Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez, Florida Senator Gayle Harrell, Congressman Brian Mast, and local elected officials for a press conference to discuss the recent outbreak of hepatitis A in Martin County and across the state.

During the press conference, DOH officials announced that they have published a new webpage, [www.floridahealth.gov/hepa](http://www.floridahealth.gov/hepa), to educate Floridians on how you can protect yourself from hepatitis A and the steps you can take to prevent the spread of infection. They have also provided a dedicated phone line, 1-844-CALL-DOH (844-225-5364), and a dedicated email inbox, [hepa@flhealth.gov](mailto:hepa@flhealth.gov), for any concerns regarding hepatitis A.

“I want to assure Martin County residents that that we are diligently working to investigate the cause of these local hepatitis A infections and will leave no stone unturned,” said **Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez**. “The cases we are seeing in Florida are part of a national outbreak since 2017. As we investigate, we are working to educate the public about how they can best respond to this situation. Hepatitis A is rarely fatal and getting vaccinated is the single most important action people at risk can take to avoid getting hepatitis A.”

“With Florida being the third largest state in the country, it is unfortunate, but not surprising that our case numbers have also been rising,” said **Dr. Carina Blackmore, the Florida State Epidemiologist**. “As we continue with our investigation in Martin County, it is important to understand that hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable liver disease. If you believe you may have hepatitis A, please consult with your doctor, especially if you have underlying health problems such as chronic liver or kidney disease or a weak immune system.”

## About Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable liver disease. While normally not fatal, persons with chronic liver or kidney disease or compromised immune systems are more likely to experience a severe illness, leading to liver failure and possible death.

Since February, 2019, 19 persons with hepatitis A, a contagious liver disease, have been reported in Martin County. Fourteen persons have been hospitalized, and three have passed away due to complications related to hepatitis A infection. Infected persons range in age from 27 to 87 years. Eight persons are known to be linked to others that had hepatitis A and five people report additional risks for hepatitis A infection including drug use and homelessness.

Since January 2018, 1,293 cases of hepatitis A have been reported statewide. This increase in cases reflects national trends, as local and state health departments across the country have worked closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to respond to similar outbreaks since March 2017.

During each investigation, DOH-Martin conducts interviews to identify close contacts of the ill person who should receive the hepatitis A vaccine to prevent disease. Additionally, DOH-Martin reviews if common activities have occurred among cases in the 50 days prior to persons becoming ill. No common shared activities, including restaurants, have been identified at this time but investigations are ongoing.

Hepatitis A is transmitted from person-to-person through contact with an infected person's feces (poop). This can result from poor hand washing after going to the bathroom. Hepatitis A can also be spread through food or water contaminated with fecal matter or during close contact with others, such as sexual contact. While most patients with hepatitis A will fully recover, some may require hospitalization. Deaths rarely occur.

The symptoms of hepatitis A can include: fever, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), tiredness, loss of appetite, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, diarrhea, and gray clay-colored stool. If you have symptoms of hepatitis A, you should visit your health care provider for evaluation. People that are exposed to hepatitis A may be given vaccine or immune globulin within 14 days of exposure to prevent infection.

DOH recommends that health care providers offer hepatitis A vaccine to all persons at risk of hepatitis A infection who have not been vaccinated or do not know their vaccination status.

Health care providers are also asked to immediately report all cases of hepatitis A to their local county health department to ensure a prompt public health response to prevent disease among close contacts.

For more information on the Florida hepatitis A outbreak visit [www.floridahealth.gov/hepa](http://www.floridahealth.gov/hepa).

If you have any questions or concerns, you can email [hepa@flhealth.gov](mailto:hepa@flhealth.gov) or call 1-844-CALL-DOH (844-225-5364) during normal operating hours.

**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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