

July 11, 2019



LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR AND FLORIDA SURGEON GENERAL MEET WITH MARTIN COUNTY STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TO DISCUSS HEPATITIS A OUTBREAK

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Tallahassee, Fla. — Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez and Florida Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees met with Martin County elected officials and community stakeholders on Wednesday, July 10th to address the Hepatitis A outbreak that has impacted Martin County and other communities across Florida. In attendance were state legislators, local government officials, the sheriff's office and health care and other community stakeholders.

Lieutenant Governor Nuñez and Surgeon General Rivkees met with these community partners to discuss Hepatitis A and their initiatives to curb the spread of Hepatitis A in Martin County and throughout the state.

"Governor DeSantis and I agree that the health and safety of Floridians is our number one priority," **said Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez.** "We are working closely with Surgeon General Rivkees, the CDC and our community partners to aggressively respond to Hepatitis A in our state."

"I have been impressed to hear how proactive Martin County has been with their vaccination and education efforts to address the Hepatitis A outbreak in their community," **said Florida Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees.** "The fact remains that while we continue to investigate the causes as to why this outbreak is happening and find ways to mitigate the effects of this disease, vaccination and education remain key components to prevention and these efforts must continue."

"I am grateful to Lieutenant Governor Nuñez and Surgeon General Rivkees for their continued efforts to address the issue of hepatitis A in our community," **said Senator Gayle Harrell.** "As we work to expand our vaccination and prevention activities here in Martin County and throughout the state, I want to assure our residents that we are doing everything possible to protect their health."

"Hepatitis A remains a serious concern for our community, especially in heavily impacted areas like Martin County," **said Representative Overdorf.** "I am grateful for Dr. Rivkees' focus on this issue and look forward to working closely with him and the entire Department of Health to ensure the safety of all residents and visitors to the area."

“Stopping the spread of hepatitis A in our community is one of the most important priorities that I am focused on,” **said Representative MaryLynn Magar**. “I am thankful for the support of our Lieutenant Governor and Surgeon General for their commitment in addressing this issue in our community, and I look forward to working with them and the leaders in our community to stop the spread of hepatitis A and protect the people of Martin County and the state of Florida.”

On July 3, 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 FDOH are partnering to control the current rise in hepatitis A cases throughout the state.](#)

Since January 2019, 1811 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), or email hepa@flhealth.gov.

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

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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