

December 13, 2019



## LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR NUÑEZ LEADS ROUNDTABLE TO ADDRESS HEPATITIS A RESPONSE

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**Tallahassee, Fla.** — Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez and Florida Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees met with various agency representatives and other partners on Thursday, December 12 to address the Hepatitis A public health emergency that has impacted communities across Florida. In attendance were: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Business and Professional Regulation, the Department of Children and Families, the Agency for Health Care Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Transportation and the Florida Hospital Association.

**Governor Ron DeSantis said**, “Our response to this public health emergency has been so effective thanks to the strong, coordinated effort between our stakeholders and agencies at the state and federal levels. Successful mobilization of our resources depends on deliberate communication and strategic planning between our leaders. These discussions are absolutely vital to enhancing our ability to protect the health and lives of all Floridians.”

“Ending the outbreak in Florida requires an effective and efficient use of every available resource,” said **Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez**. “Multi-agency and stakeholder collaboration is the proven key to quickly and successfully ending the public health emergency. This approach has dramatically increased the number of vaccinations administered to at-risk Floridians and continues to drive significantly lower rates of infection.”

**Florida Surgeon General Dr. Scott Rivkees said**, “Florida has experienced a decrease in new hepatitis A infections since the declaration of a public health emergency on August 1. This is due in large part to the diligent work of Department staff at our County Health Departments, which continue providing affordable and no-cost vaccinations, and our local government and health care partners, who continue immunizing at-risk populations and promoting the best sanitary practices for prevention.”

The decline in weekly and monthly cases is attributed to an increase in vaccination rates, effective public messaging and the continued implementation of evidence-based best practices. Since January 1, 2019, more than 290,000 vaccines have administered by County Health Department staff and private providers, including 145,000 vaccinations since August 1, alone. Other factors that continue to support this downward trend are outreach and education efforts,

encouraging people to practice good hand-hygiene and tracking the outbreak through public health surveillance methods.

## **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 are not aware that, in the United States, Hepatitis A is more commonly spread from person to person.

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. The vaccine is recommended for adults at-risk, including groups affected in these outbreaks, as well as travelers to certain international countries.

## **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

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 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.

### **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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