



Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services  
**HEALTH ALERT NETWORK**  
**Advisory**

TO: Healthcare providers and public health

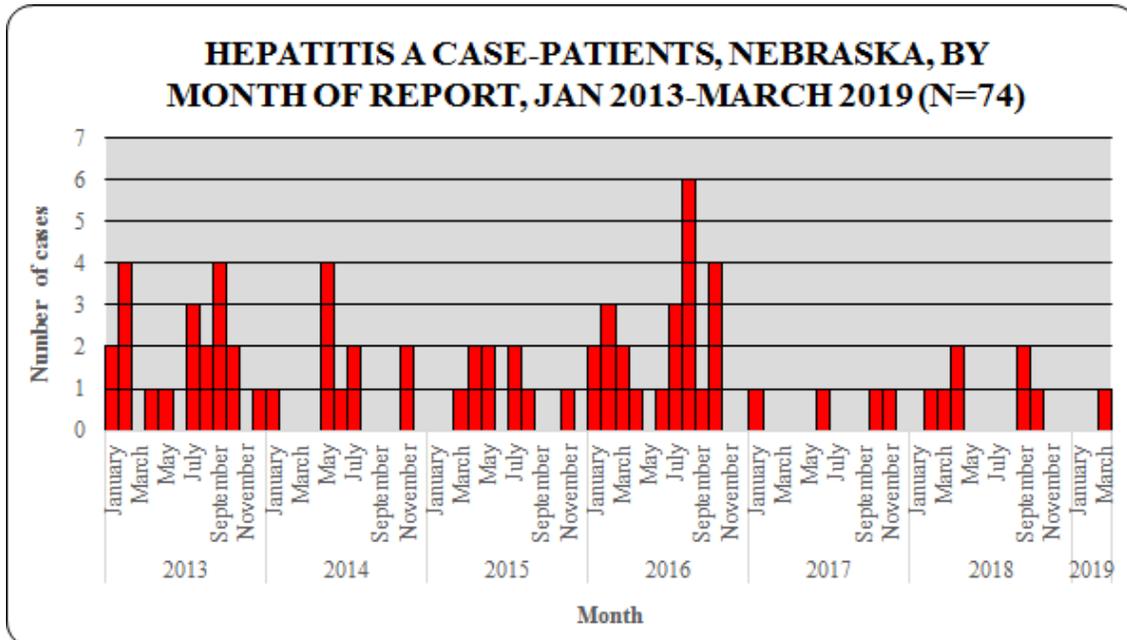
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RE: Outbreaks of Hepatitis A among people using drugs or experiencing homelessness

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Multiple states have reported outbreaks of hepatitis A virus (HAV), primarily among people who inject drugs and people experiencing homelessness. Since such hepatitis A outbreaks were first identified in 2016, more than 15,000 cases, 8,500 (57%) hospitalizations, and 140 deaths have been reported.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and local health departments track all HAV IgM (+) lab reports, follow up with patients and providers, and implement control measures as needed. Beyond a cluster of 10 cases in the summer of 2016 related to contaminated strawberries, Nebraska has experienced no recent outbreaks of Hepatitis A. Additionally, no cases in the past 5 years have reported injection drug use or homelessness as risk factors. However, this risk has been established in other states and the recommendations below should be followed to prevent such outbreaks from occurring in Nebraska.



While hepatitis A vaccination is not among the vaccines required for school entry in Nebraska, patients and their health care providers have recognized and embraced the hepatitis vaccine since first being licensed in 1995. The National Immunization Survey (<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/childvaxview/data-reports/hepa/dashboard/2017.html>) estimates that 68% of children in Nebraska received two doses of Hepatitis A vaccine by 35 months of age in 2017. We encourage the incorporation of hepatitis A vaccine into childhood vaccinations, along with immunizing foreign travelers and persons from the high risk groups noted below.

### **Recommendations for Healthcare Providers**

1. Screen patients for risk factors (e.g., drug use, homelessness, incarceration, men who have sex with men (MSM), and chronic liver disease).
2. Recommend and administer hepatitis A vaccine to at-risk patients, regardless of the original presenting complaint or the type of clinical facility. In particular, the emergency department may be an individual's only interaction with the healthcare system and is an important opportunity for prevention. The following groups are at highest risk for acquiring HAV infection or developing serious complications from HAV infection and should be offered the hepatitis A vaccine:
  - o **People who use drugs (injection or non-injection)**
  - o **People experiencing homelessness**
  - o **Men who have sex with men (MSM)**
  - o **People who are, or were recently, incarcerated**
  - o **People with chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C**
3. Record immunizations in the state immunization information system (NESIIS). More information on reporting to NESIIS can be found at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Nebraska-Immunization-Information-System.aspx>.
4. Consider hepatitis A in anyone with jaundice or clinically compatible symptoms.
5. Rapidly report all persons diagnosed with hepatitis A to your local health department to ensure timely case investigation and follow-up of contacts.

### **For More Information**

1. MMWR. *Hepatitis A Virus Outbreaks Associated with Drug Use and Homelessness – California, Kentucky, Michigan, and Utah, 2017*.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6743a3.htm>
2. CDC's Hepatitis A Outbreak website.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/2017March-HepatitisA.htm>
3. Outbreak specific considerations for hepatitis A vaccine administration.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/outbreaks/InterimOutbreakGuidance-HAV-VaccineAdmin.htm>
4. CDC's Hepatitis A Virus website. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/index.htm>
5. Hepatitis A General Information Fact Sheet.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/pdfs/hepageneralfactsheet.pdf>
6. CDC's The Pink Book. Chapter 9: Hepatitis A.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/hepa.pdf>
7. Information on Nebraska's local health departments.  
<http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Local-Health-Departments.aspx>