

Continuing Hepatitis A Outbreak in Muskoka: Update #3

Consider immunizing your patients with Hep A vaccine

One dose of publicly-funded Hep A vaccine available for a limited time for those who have never been immunized and without private insurance

Attention: Muskoka area: Physicians, Emergency Departments, Nurse Practitioners, Infection Control Practitioners, Occupational Health Professionals, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, Midwives, Family Health Teams, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Wahta First Nation
Central LHIN, NSM LHIN

Date: August 4, 2020

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) has been investigating [an increase in Hepatitis A \(HAV\) cases in Muskoka](#). The investigation thus far has identified that the index case of this cluster was likely a returning traveler in October 2019 who then introduced this subtype into the community. It has now propagated through person-to-person spread with secondary transmission. **There is now a total of 30 confirmed cases throughout Muskoka and the North Bay Parry Sound area with evidence of continuing transmission, and transmission among persons who do not have risk factors or who have not been in close contact with infected persons.**

HAV vaccine is recommended for anyone older than six months of age who is at an increased risk of infection or severe illness, and also for those who would like to decrease their risk of acquiring HAV. Given the cluster of unknown origin in Muskoka, please consider discussing Hepatitis A vaccine with your patients when:

- The patients have private extended health care coverage.
- Can afford the cost of HAV vaccine or Twinrix (if not previously immunized for Hepatitis B).
- Are normally eligible for publicly-funded vaccines (intravenous drug use, liver disease (chronic), including Hepatitis B and C, and men who have sex with men).

The best protection and prevention of the spread of Hepatitis A is vaccination. **We are working with the Ministry of Health to have our community protected by offering one dose of HAV vaccine for a short period of time to residents of Muskoka, South River, Sundridge and Burk's Falls who have never received Hepatitis A vaccine and are without private extended health care coverage and who cannot otherwise afford the cost. A limited supply of Hepatitis A vaccine will be available. SMDHU will be offering immunization clinics by appointment, 1-2 days per week, from August 14 until the end of September or until the supply is exhausted. These clinics will be in Huntsville and Gravenhurst. North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (NBPSDHU) will also be offering clinics.**

If your patients may be eligible and they are interested in booking an appointment for Hepatitis A vaccination, please have them call SMDHU Health Connection at (705) 721-7520 ext. 8813 during business hours (Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.).



What We Know:

- Hepatitis A is a liver infection caused by the Hepatitis A virus.
- It is easily transmitted from person-to-person, and can be spread when people who have the virus contaminate food, drinks, surfaces, and everyday objects.
- The Hepatitis A vaccine is effective at preventing symptoms and spreading the virus to family, friends or colleagues.
- Hepatitis A Immunization is free (for those who qualify) by booking an appointment at our health unit office in Huntsville or Gravenhurst.
- Individuals with private extended health care coverage who would like to get the vaccine can contact their health care provider.
- Individuals with private extended health care coverage who would like to get the vaccine and do not have a health care provider may be directed to the health unit.
- NBPSDHU is offering clinics for residents in the areas of South River, Sundridge and Burk's Falls.

For Those Previously Vaccinated with Hepatitis A Vaccine:

- If two previous doses were provided, no additional doses are recommended.
- If only one dose was provided and it was less than six months ago, no additional doses are recommended until at least six months from the last dose.
- If only one dose was provided and it was greater than six months ago, one additional dose is recommended for long-term immunity. **However, they will not be eligible for the publicly-funded, time-limited supply we have for August and September.**

Testing Recommendations:

If patients present in your office with unexplained symptoms that are consistent with HAV, please consider ordering liver function tests (ALT, AST, ALP, GGT), and HAV IgM and IgG antibodies.

Please note outbreak #2260-2020-086 on the lab requisition for HAV serology.

Antibodies are generally detectable in serum five to ten days after infection and usually decrease to undetectable levels within six months after onset of infection. In rare cases, antibodies may persist for longer. Detection of IgG antibodies signals recovery from acute HAV infection. When IgG antibodies are detected alone, they indicate some level of immunity either from past infection or previous immunization.

"Total HAV virus antibody" (total IgM and IgG antibody) is not a confirmatory test for acute HAV infection but is used as an initial screening test in some laboratories. For further information about HAV IgM and IgG human diagnostic testing, contact the Public Health Ontario Laboratories or refer to the Public Health Ontario Laboratory Services webpage:

http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/ServicesAndTools/LaboratoryServices/Pages/Hepatitis_A_Diagnostic_Serology.aspx#.VxT6K45VhXs

HAV Vaccine is always Publicly Funded for Persons Who Meet the Following High-risk Criteria:

- Intravenous drug use
- Liver disease (chronic), including Hepatitis B and C
- Men who have sex with men

Clinicians are asked to remain vigilant in monitoring for Hepatitis A infection. Please continue to offer pre-exposure prophylaxis to high risk groups.

For further information regarding HAV, to coordinate access to immunoglobulin or to report a suspect or confirmed case of HAV, please contact the Infectious Diseases Team at 705-721-7520 ext. 8809 during business hours (Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.).