

DHHS Confirms Death Related to Hepatitis A Outbreak

Raleigh

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The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has confirmed the first death related to an ongoing outbreak of hepatitis A [affecting parts of North Carolina](#). The death occurred in October. To protect the privacy of the family, additional details about the case are not being released.

Hepatitis A is a contagious and vaccine-preventable liver infection that can range from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months. It is usually transmitted through food or water that has been contaminated with small, undetectable amounts of feces from a contagious person.

“The best way to protect yourself against hepatitis A is through vaccination,” said Dr. Heidi Swygard, viral hepatitis medical director in DHHS’ Division of Public Health. “Good handwashing is also important, especially after using the bathroom, changing diapers and before preparing or eating food. Anyone who thinks they may have been infected or exposed should seek medical attention.”

An average of 41 cases of hepatitis A were reported each year in North Carolina from 2013-2017, and a total of 64 cases have already been reported this year as of the end of October. Of those 64 cases, 37 have been connected to the ongoing outbreak. More than 70 percent of cases reported in 2018 have resulted in hospitalization.

Since 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has received more than 7,000 reports of hepatitis A linked to a multi-state outbreak with higher than expected hospitalization and death rates. Because hepatitis A causes inflammation of the liver, anyone with underlying liver disease is at risk of more serious illness if infected.

Symptoms of hepatitis A include fever, fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite and stomach pain. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and/or eyes), dark-colored urine and clay-colored bowel movements may also occur. These symptoms can appear within 15-50 days (average 28 days) following infection with the virus.

DHHS advises anyone with symptoms of hepatitis A to contact their health care provider, who can perform a blood test for the virus. Anyone exhibiting these symptoms should refrain from preparing food for others. Patients can transmit the virus to others in the two weeks before and one week after jaundice appears.

DHHS has been working with local public health authorities to provide vaccination for at-risk populations and to increase clinician awareness of this outbreak.

For more information about viral hepatitis, visit <https://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/hepatitis/related.html>. The CDC has more information about outbreaks of hepatitis A in multiple states [on its website](#).