For Immediate Release

Area health departments unite to vaccinate inmates at North Central Regional Jail against Hepatitis A after weekend outbreak

MORGANTOWN, WV (September 8, 2018) — A Hepatitis A outbreak has occurred at North Central Regional Jail in Doddridge County, with two inmates coming down with the illness and others showing symptoms.

In an effort coordinated by Doddridge County Health Department, 874 doses of Hepatitis A vaccine were collected Saturday from Monongalia County Health Department (500); Marion County Health Department (140); Harrison County Health Department (134); and Preston County Health Department (100).

North Central Regional Jail houses about 850 inmates who were being vaccinated on Saturday evening. Seven volunteers from Monongalia and Harrison county health departments joined seven Doddridge County Health Department employees to administer the vaccines.

“We found out about this at 11 a.m. this morning and at 4 p.m., we started our vaccination clinic, which is amazing for our region,” said Robert White, regional epidemiologist from Monongalia County Health Department.

Southern West Virginia has been battling an outbreak of Hepatitis A that began in San Diego and has landed in the Charleston-Huntington area, with 1,166 cases reported in West Virginia as of Friday, Sept. 7, 2018, according to the website for the state Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services (https://dhhr.wv.gov/oeps/disease).

“The overall goal is to vaccinate the entire prison population and protect them from Hepatitis A,” said Debbie Davis, administrator of the Doddridge County Health Department, who also expressed her appreciation for the help from other counties.
According to the OEPS website, the increase in Hepatitis A cases began in March 2018 and has primarily occurred among injection and non-injection drug users, homeless or mobile individuals and those who have been recently incarcerated. Viral sequencing has linked cases from Kentucky and California.

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A is spread through contact with feces of infected persons or through contaminated food or water. Drug users, homeless individuals, people in prison and people who live in unsanitary conditions are at a higher risk for Hepatitis A.

Most adults with Hepatitis A have symptoms, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These include fatigue, low appetite, stomach pain, nausea and jaundice. The illness usually resolves itself within two months. However, in West Virginia, more than 52 percent of the individuals diagnosed with Hepatitis A were hospitalized and two have died.

The inmates at North Central Regional Jail who contracted Hepatitis A came down with jaundice and had flu-like symptoms, and Hepatitis A was confirmed on Friday. Four additional inmates then presented with similar symptoms.

Health providers who traveled to Doddridge County to administer vaccines include epidemiologist Robert White and Threat Prep coordinator Joe Klass from Monongalia County Health Department and Donna Riffle, Ramona Swiger, Jill Foppiano, Sandy Reep and Margaret Howe-White from Harrison County Health Department. They joined members of Doddridge County Health Department: Debbie Davis, Laura Cottrill, Dawn Kniceley, Elizabeth Brown, Brenda Corder, Chris Mitchell and Heather Amos.

The Hepatitis A vaccine is usually given in two doses at least one month apart; however, White said the first dose provides 98 percent immunity. “We don’t know if we will have to give a second dose,” White added.

Dr. Lee B. Smith, county health officer and executive director at Monongalia County Health Department, said he was happy that regional public health staff came together to respond to the outbreak.

“I am very proud at how our six-county region was able to mobilize and put forth an emergency vaccination clinic for 850 people in an attempt to stem this multi-state viral hepatitis,” Smith said.
He also noted that the CDC recommended that all first responders get vaccinated for Hepatitis A by contacting their local health departments.

There are vaccines to prevent Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B but not Hepatitis C.

In a proactive effort to keep an outbreak from occurring in Monongalia County, public health nurses organized by Jennifer Goldcamp, director of nursing at MCHD Clinical Services, held inoculation clinics in May at Bartlett House, Milan Puskar Health Right and the soup kitchen at Trinity Episcopal Church. They also went out into the community with members of MUSHROOM, the Multidisciplinary Unsheltered Homeless Relief Outreach of Morgantown, in order to offer the vaccine to homeless individuals.

To make an appointment to get a Hepatitis A vaccine at MCHD Clinical Services, call 304-598-5119 for an appointment.

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