

# ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN



**JULY 2019**

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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: HEPATITIS A



**W**orld Hepatitis Day, observed on July 28 every year, aims to raise global awareness of hepatitis — a group of infectious diseases known as hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E. Unfortunately, in Kentucky, deaths from hepatitis A are increasing. For that reason, we want to encourage prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for hepatitis.

### How common is hepatitis in Kentucky?

Kentucky has declared an outbreak status for hepatitis A. As of May 2019, more than 4,500 cases have been reported, leading to 2,254 hospitalizations and 57 deaths. In previous years, Kentucky only saw an average of about 20 cases a year.

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# The best way to prevent hepatitis A is to be vaccinated.



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## What is it?

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver infection caused by a virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months, and sometimes it can be fatal. Hepatitis A can cause loss of appetite, jaundice, nausea, tiredness, fever, stomach pain, brown-colored urine, light-colored stools, and diarrhea. It could take almost seven weeks after exposure for someone to become ill. Someone sick with hepatitis A is most likely to spread the virus during the two weeks prior to feeling sick or noticing symptoms.

## How is it spread?

Hepatitis A usually spreads when a person unknowingly ingests the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated by small, undetected amounts of feces from an infected person. The virus spreads when an infected person does not wash his or her hands adequately after using the toilet or engages in behaviors that increase the risk of infection. People at high risk for the spread of hepatitis A

*Experts recommend the vaccine for all children older than 1 year old, those at high risk, and people with medical conditions. The vaccine is given as two shots six months apart.*

include people who use drugs (injectable or noninjectable), those experiencing homelessness, and people who travel internationally.

## How to protect yourself

The best way to prevent hepatitis A is to be vaccinated. Experts recommend the vaccine for all children older than 1 year old, those at high risk, and people with medical conditions. The vaccine is given as two shots six months apart. Frequent and thorough handwashing with soap and water can help prevent the spread of hepatitis A.

## REFERENCES

- <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/worldhepday.htm>
- <https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dph/dehp/idb/Pages/hepAoutbreak.aspx>
- <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/investigations/2019/02/21/hepatitis-a-in-kentucky-what-you-need-to-know/2568631002>
- <https://nkyhealth.org/individual-or-family/health-alerts/hepatitis-a>

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