



ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Our Community. Our Environment.

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DATE: November 22, 2017
TO: St. Clair County Physicians
FROM: Annette Mercatante, MD, MPH
Medical Health Officer
St. Clair County Health Department
RE: **Hepatitis A Outbreak**

In light of the hepatitis A outbreak in St. Clair County it is imperative to address a few key issues:

- Hepatitis A is a very serious illness with great impact on patient's health; it is essential that the medical community embrace this and make a strong recommendation for vaccine. The idea that hepatitis A is mild, self-limiting or does not exist in St. Clair County is simply reckless and potentially harmful. Currently >82% of hepatitis A patients are hospitalized and there have been 20 deaths.
- Confirmatory test must be done on suspect hepatitis A patients. This test is an Immunoglobulin M (IgM) antibody to hepatitis A.
 - Screening for **total** hepatitis A antibodies (IgG and IgM) can indicate past exposure to the disease or recent vaccination and cannot confirm acute disease. Verifying vaccine status in MCIR should assist.
- Timeliness of diagnosis and communication with St. Clair County Health Department is a necessity to interrupt transmission of the disease. Intense contact tracing and investigations by public health nurses take place on all patients diagnosed with hepatitis A as post exposure prophylaxis must be provided to contacts within 14 days of exposure.
- Diagnosing (or inappropriately diagnosing) a patient with hepatitis A can have a devastating effect on social well-being as it has been demonstrated during this outbreak that patients have been ostracized, especially those working in food service.
- Ramifications on food establishments if an employee is diagnosed (or inappropriately diagnosed) with hepatitis A have resulted in financial hardship on the businesses including the loss or closure of the restaurant.

I ask for your cooperation on this matter as we need to work together to eliminate the spread of this disease. Please feel free to contact me with questions amercatante@stclaircounty.org and visit www.michigan.gov/hepatitisaoutbreak for up to date information.