



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Ashwin Vasani, MD, PhD
Commissioner

2023 Health Alert #24: Increase in Hepatitis A Diagnoses among Men Who Have Sex with Men

- The New York City Department of Health Mental Hygiene is investigating an increase in hepatitis A cases among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM), with nearly 30% of reported cases in 2023 being among MSM.
- Providers should offer the full two-dose hepatitis A vaccine series to all MSM and any person in their sexual networks who have never been vaccinated against hepatitis A or are unsure of their vaccination status, consistent with Centers for Disease Control and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices [guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/hepa.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/hepa.html>).

Please share this alert with all emergency medicine, family medicine, primary care physicians, HIV specialists, infectious disease, and internal medicine staff in your facility.

November 14, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) is investigating an increase in hepatitis A diagnoses among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM). In a typical year, approximately 20% of reported hepatitis A diagnoses are among MSM. Since January 1, 2023, nearly 30% of reported hepatitis A diagnoses (13 of 46 people) have been among MSM, half of which were reported in September and October 2023. The 13 MSM patients resided throughout NYC and ranged in age from 22 to 43 years. Nine of the 13 patients (69%) were hospitalized and all have recovered; none of the patients previously received hepatitis A vaccine.

Hepatitis A is transmitted person-to-person through the fecal-oral route. Hepatitis A can specifically be spread through a spectrum of sexual contact, including direct anal-oral contact or contact with fingers or objects that have been in or near the anus of an infected person and contaminated with stool. Hepatitis A can also be spread through contaminated food or water, which most often occurs in countries outside the United States where hepatitis A is common. While most patients fully recover, in 2022, 80% of adult patients in NYC with hepatitis A were hospitalized, and in the United States, hepatitis A is responsible for approximately 160 deaths annually.

Since 1996, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended that all MSM receive two doses of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine; the second dose should be administered 6 to 12 months after the first dose. **Further, any adult wishing to be protected against hepatitis A should be vaccinated; a risk factor does not need to be acknowledged or reported by the individual.** Hepatitis A vaccine is also recommended for all children who have not previously been vaccinated. As of September 2023, estimated coverage for pre-teens and adolescents ages 11 to 18 years in NYC was 79% for at least one dose of hepatitis A vaccine and 69% for two doses (NYC Citywide Immunization Registry (CIR) data). It is likely that many adults have not been vaccinated.

It is important to assess your patients' vaccination status at every visit, regardless of the reason for the visit. Providers can check the CIR for their patients' vaccination status (visit nyc.gov/health/cir to register for the CIR), recognizing CIR data are incomplete, particularly for vaccinations given to adults. **Do not delay vaccination to evaluate exposure history or immunity prior.** If you want to check a patient's immunity (due to prior infection or vaccination), draw blood, but administer the first dose of hepatitis A vaccine during the patient encounter. It is safe to administer vaccine even if a patient has had prior infection or vaccination.

Some health insurance plans, including Medicaid, will pay a vaccine acquisition cost and administration fee. Providers can purchase vaccine from the manufacturer or from their usual distributor. If you do not administer hepatitis A vaccine, please refer patients to a facility that does. Most pediatric providers administer hepatitis A vaccine, including providers participating in the Vaccines for Children program. Sites administering hepatitis A vaccine to adults in NYC, including pharmacies, can be found on the NYC [Health Map](#) or by calling **311**.

Report all laboratory-confirmed cases of hepatitis A infection to the NYC Health Department via NYCMED at nyc.gov/nycmed within 24 hours, as required by the NYC Health Code. You may also report by telephone, Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. by calling 866-NYC-DOH1 (866-692-3641) or via facsimile. Unvaccinated contacts of people with hepatitis A should be notified of exposure and offered vaccination for Hepatitis A within 14 days of last exposure. The NYC Health Department can assist with notification and prophylaxis if notified promptly.

We greatly appreciate your partnership.

Sincerely,



Celia Quinn, MD, MPH
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Disease Control