For Immediate Release

Hep A outbreak in southern WV prompts proactive measures by MCHD

MORGANTOWN, WV (May 10, 2018) — An outbreak of Hepatitis A in parts of the United States, including southern West Virginia, has prompted Monongalia County Health Department officials to take a proactive approach in order to keep North Central West Virginia residents safe.

Public health nurses from MCHD’s Clinical Services program will begin visiting locations around the county the week of May 21 to administer Hepatitis A vaccinations. They will be accompanied by Dr. Lee B. Smith, the health department’s executive director and county health officer.

Nurses will visit the Friendship Room at Milan Puskar HealthRight from 1 to 4 p.m. Monday, May 21 and the soup kitchen at Trinity Episcopal Church from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 22. Times and dates for other locations, including Bartlett House, will be determined soon, said Jennifer Goldcamp, director of nursing at MCHD Clinical Services.

Nurses also will go out into the field with the West Virginia University-based group MUSHROOM, or Multidisciplinary UnSheltered Homeless Relief Outreach Of Morgantown, Goldcamp added, to identify people who are living outdoors who could benefit from these vaccines.

Additional efforts to identify one of the major populations targeted in this outreach—the homeless—will be made in a joint endeavor between first responders and MCHD, Smith said.

“We feel it’s a matter of time until members of the southern West Virginia homeless community infects others in the homeless community, and eventually that will infect a lot of people in the state,” Smith said.
Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A, B and C have all been in the news lately. Hepatitis C, for which there is no vaccine, does have a cure. People born between 1945 and 1965 are encouraged to be tested for Hepatitis C because 75 percent of the people who have it are in that demographic.

In the United States, West Virginia has the highest rates of infection of Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C. Hepatitis D and Hepatitis E are rare and they are co-infections of Hepatitis B, which someone must have first in order to develop Hep D or Hep E. While rare, Hepatitis E is particularly virulent for pregnant women.

The Hepatitis A outbreak began in the homeless population in San Diego and has spread to southern West Virginia, where Kanawha-Charleston Health Department officials are investigating more than 60 possible cases of the disease, including a recent one in a fast-food employee. Officials from that health department and the Kanawha County Board of Education also are working with Dupont Middle School officials to investigate two possibly linked cases at the school.

Hepatitis A is spread through contact with feces of infected persons. In children, this can happen if infected children contaminate their own fingers and then touch an object. Children who touch that object and then put their fingers in their mouths then can become infected with Hepatitis A.

There also is a fear that because of the Hepatitis A outbreak, other diseases, including Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV, also will rise.

One bright spot is that there are vaccines to prevent both Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B. Doctors already recommend the vaccines for Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B as part of the vaccination schedule for infants and young children.

Hepatitis A requires two doses and Hepatitis B requires three doses, which can present a challenge when working with a community of itinerant people without addresses.

“You need to be able to find people again,” Smith said.

In conjunction with WVU’s School of Nursing, MCHD holds a Hepatitis Clinic on Fridays. Individuals may be tested and, if needed, treated for hepatitis. To make an appointment for the clinic, call 304-598-5119.

In addition to getting the vaccine, good hand hygiene is recommended to avoid getting Hepatitis A. It is recommended that individuals wash their hands with soap and water for at least 30 seconds, or enough time to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
To learn more about hepatitis and to find out the various forms of transmission for each one, check out the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s website, cdc.gov/hepatitis.

To get a vaccine for Hepatitis A and/or Hepatitis B at MCHD Clinical Services, call 304-598-5119.

For more information on MCHD, check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD for up-to-date information on health and safety.