For Immediate Release

Hepatitis A confirmed in Morgantown food worker; vaccinations recommended

MORGANTOWN, WV (Oct. 23, 2019) — Monongalia County Health Department has confirmed a case of Hepatitis A in a food worker at Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen on Earl Core Road in Morgantown.

“While the risk of contracting Hepatitis A from a food worker is low, people who have not been vaccinated against Hepatitis A who have consumed food from the restaurant within the past two weeks should consider getting a Hepatitis A vaccine to prevent infection,” said Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer.

Dates the employee worked at Popeyes while potentially contagious are Sept. 30-Oct. 16. That means people who ate food from the restaurant starting Oct. 9 can still benefit from the Hepatitis A vaccine. If vaccinated within two weeks of being exposed, it can prevent Hepatitis A infection.

Symptoms of Hepatitis A may be any combination of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, low-grade fever, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, muscle and joint aches, dark urine, weight loss and jaundice.

Anyone who becomes ill or exhibits some of these symptoms should contact a health care provider.

Anyone working as a food handler who experiences Hepatitis A symptoms should not work and should be seen by a health care provider.

“While some Hepatitis A symptoms are vague and flu-like, jaundice, which gives a person yellow skin and/or eyes, is much more specific symptom of Hepatitis,” Dr. Smith said.
Area health care providers should be aware of the potential for Hepatitis A cases and also that MCHD has both Hepatitis A vaccine and immunoglobulin available.

MCHD is working with Popeyes management, which has been cooperating with the health department. Food workers are being vaccinated before being allowed to return to work, Dr. Smith added. MCHD has been in contact with both the owners and corporate headquarters and is aware that a biohazard level cleanup is underway.

Hepatitis A is an inflammation of the liver. It is spread through fecal-oral contact. In addition to receiving the Hepatitis A vaccine, good handwashing techniques with warm or hot water and soap for at least 30 seconds at all times, including after using the bathroom and also before preparing food, are recommended to avoid spread of the illness.

“West Virginia is currently in the midst of a multi-state Hepatitis A outbreak,” Dr. Smith said.

Cabell and Kanawha counties having been particularly hard hit. Currently in West Virginia, there have been 2,577 confirmed cases of Hepatitis A since the outbreak began in March 2018. Nearly 50 percent of the people who have contracted Hepatitis A in West Virginia during this outbreak have been hospitalized and 23 have died.

To get a vaccine at MCHD Clinical Services, call 304-598-5105 to make an appointment between the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. If you have urgent questions after hours, call 304-680-4357. Vaccination appointments cannot be made after hours.

To learn more about Hepatitis, check out the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s website, cdc.gov/hepatitis.

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

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