



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
P. O. BOX 3378
HONOLULU, HI 96801-3378

In reply, please refer to:
File:

January 18, 2017

**MEDICAL ADVISORY: RISK OF HEPATITIS A EXPOSURE
THROUGH THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS**

Dear Healthcare Provider,

The Hawaii Department of Health (HDOH) has been alerted to an ongoing outbreak of hepatitis A infections in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). HDOH has recently investigated five cases of hepatitis A with reported exposure to RMI either directly (e.g., travel) or indirectly (e.g., ingesting food or having visitors from RMI); epidemiologic investigation and sequencing of viral specimens indicates these cases are distinct and separate from the recent hepatitis A outbreak on Oahu.

HDOH is advising clinicians to be vigilant for possible hepatitis A infections in symptomatic individuals who have traveled to or from the RMI, had visitors from the RMI, or had exposure to food originating in the RMI. Furthermore, patients who are planning travel to the RMI should strongly consider vaccination against hepatitis A before travel.¹

Cases of HAV infection, which is URGENTLY notifiable, should be reported by telephone as soon as illness is suspected—do not wait for laboratory confirmation to report. Please be prepared to provide your patient's AST (SGOT) and ALT (SGPT) values.

HAV transmission is person-to-person by fecal-oral route or through ingestion of a contaminated vehicle such as food. Infected persons are most infectious during the 1–2 weeks before onset of jaundice or elevation of liver enzymes, when concentration of virus in the stool is highest, until one week after jaundice or symptom onset. The incubation period for HAV infection may be 15–50 days (average 28 days). Onset of symptoms is abrupt with fever, malaise, anorexia, nausea, dark urine, abdominal discomfort, and/or jaundice. Diarrhea may also occur. Many cases, especially children, have mild or asymptomatic infection. Clinical illness typically lasts several weeks and resolves within 2 months. Household and sexual contacts are at increased risk of infection.

Diagnosis requires detection of IgM antibodies against HAV (anti-HAV IgM) in serum of acutely or recently ill patients—assessing IgM antibodies in asymptomatic individuals is NOT advised. False positive IgM tests do occur, so testing should only be performed in those fulfilling clinical criteria for acute or recent infection. A total anti-HAV antibodies (i.e., IgG +

¹ See <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HA/HAVfaq.htm#C1>, “How soon before travel should the first dose of Hepatitis A vaccine be given?” for more specific recommendations for travelers.

**** This message contains privileged communication between the Department of Health and clinicians and should not be shared with or forwarded to those not included among the original recipients. ****

IgM) level is not useful for diagnosing or distinguishing recent HAV infection.

Persons who have recently been exposed to HAV and who previously have not received HAV vaccine should receive a single dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG; 0.02 mL/kg) as soon as possible, **within 2 weeks after exposure**.^{*} The efficacy of IG or vaccine when administered greater than 2 weeks after exposure has not been established.

- For healthy persons aged 12 months–40 years, single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine at the age-appropriate dose is preferred.
- For persons aged >40 years, IG is preferred; vaccine can be used if IG cannot be obtained.
- For children aged <12 months, immunocompromised persons, persons with chronic liver disease, and persons for whom vaccine is contraindicated, IG should be used.

Persons with HAV infection should be excluded from food-handling and direct-care occupations for the first 2 weeks of illness and at least 7 days after onset of jaundice. Children with HAV infection should be excluded from preschool for 10 days after illness onset.

Oahu (Disease Investigation Branch)(808) 586-4586
Maui District Health Office(808) 984-8213
Kauai District Health Office(808) 241-3563
Big Island District Health Office (Hilo)(808) 933-0912
Big Island District Health Office (Kona).....(808) 322-4877
After hours on Oahu.....(808) 566-5049
After hours on Neighbor Islands.....(808) 360-2575 (toll free)

We appreciate your assistance in monitoring and preventing HAV infection among Hawaii’s residents and visitors.

Sincerely,



Sarah Y. Park, MD, FAAP
State Epidemiologist
Hawaii Department of Health

^{*} For further information regarding hepatitis A post-exposure prophylaxis, please refer to:
<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HA/HAfaq.htm#D1>

**** This message contains privileged communication between the Department of Health and clinicians and should not be shared with or forwarded to those not included among the original recipients. ****