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### **Hepatitis A: What You Need To Know**

The Ohio Department of Health recently declared a statewide outbreak of hepatitis A. Ohio typically experiences approximately 40 cases of hepatitis A each year. Since January 2018, Ohio has experienced 82 cases of hepatitis A. Additionally, surrounding states, including Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia are also experiencing hepatitis A outbreaks. Many of the cases of hepatitis A linked with the recent outbreak have been associated with drug use (injection and non-injection) and homelessness.

Guernsey County has had two cases of hepatitis A during calendar year 2018, both with travel outside of Ohio. Although local transmission is not a concern at this time, the Cambridge-Guernsey County Health Department staff continues to monitor for potential cases.

Hepatitis A, a vaccine-preventable illness caused by the Hepatitis A virus (HAV), is typically spread when a person ingests fecal matter, even in microscopic amounts, from contact with objects, food or drink contaminated by the stool of an infected person. HAV can also be spread from close personal contact with an infected person, such as through sex.

Signs and symptoms of hepatitis A infection include fatigue, low appetite, stomach pain, nausea, clay-colored stools and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). People with hepatitis A can experience mild illness lasting a few weeks to severe illness lasting several months.

The best way to prevent hepatitis A infection is through vaccination with the hepatitis A vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended hepatitis

A vaccine for children beginning at age 12 months, with a second dose at 18 months, since 2006. Additionally, the CDC recommends the following groups be vaccinated against hepatitis A:

- Persons who are at increased risk for infection:
  - Persons traveling to or working in countries that have high rates of hepatitis A;
  - Men who have sex with men;
  - Persons who use injection and non-injection drugs;
  - Persons who have occupational risk for infection;
  - Persons who have chronic liver disease;
  - Persons who have clotting-factor disorders;
  - Household members and other close personal contacts or adopted children newly arriving from countries with high rates of hepatitis A; and
  - Persons with direct contact with persons who have hepatitis A.
- Persons who are at increased risk for complications from hepatitis A, including people with chronic liver diseases, such as hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- Any person wishing to obtain immunity

People who believe they are at high risk for hepatitis A infection should contact their healthcare provider or local health department for additional information. Vaccination is available for adults and children at the Cambridge-Guernsey County Health Department, as well as through local medical providers and pharmacies. Contact the Cambridge-Guernsey County Health Department at 740-439-3577 for questions.