



County of Erie

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

HEALTH ALERT PRIORITY # 216 February 9, 2008

Hepatitis A in a Produce Handler at a Local Grocery Store: Possible Consumer Exposures

Please distribute to Emergency Departments, Infection Control Departments, Employee Health Services, Infectious Disease Departments, Pediatrics, Director of Nursing, Medical Director, Pharmacy, Laboratory Director and all patient care areas.

SUMMARY

- The Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) has identified a case of acute hepatitis A in a produce handler at a local Wegmans grocery store located at 5275 Sheridan Drive, Williamsville.
- The produce handler worked while infectious during January and February, 2008.
- Persons who consumed produce purchased at the above Wegmans location from January 7, 2008 through February 8, 2008 may have been exposed to hepatitis A virus.
- Persons who within the past two weeks consumed uncooked produce purchased from January 7, 2008 through February 8, 2008 at the above Wegmans location without prior history of hepatitis A vaccination or history of hepatitis A infection may be candidates for post-exposure prophylaxis with hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (see below).
- The ECDOH will be holding clinics for exposed persons on Saturday, February 9, 2008 and Sunday, February 10, 2008 at the Erie Community College (ECC) North Campus.
- Providers are encouraged to consider and test for hepatitis A in patients with jaundice, abdominal pain, fever, nausea, and diarrhea with a history of produce purchases at the above Wegmans location.
- Providers should report suspected and confirmed cases of hepatitis A promptly to the ECDOH at (716) 858-7697. Suspected cases of hepatitis A in a food worker should be reported *immediately* by phone.

BACKGROUND

A confirmed case of hepatitis A has been identified in a produce handler employed at the Wegmans grocery store located at 5275 Sheridan Drive, Williamsville. The produce handler worked while potentially infectious during January and February. Because it is likely the employee followed good hand hygiene and food safety practices, the risk of exposure is small. However, the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH), in collaboration with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has decided to provide preventative treatment to anyone who was exposed with the past two weeks.

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus and can affect persons of all ages. Some infected persons, particularly young children, are asymptomatic. When symptoms are present, they usually occur abruptly and can include the following:

- Fever
- Tiredness

- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal discomfort
- Dark urine
- Jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes)

Children aged <6 years may not have any symptoms or if illness does occur, it is typically mild and not accompanied by jaundice. Symptoms usually last less than 2 months; although some persons may be ill for as long as 6 months. The average incubation period for hepatitis A is 28 days, with a range of 15 – 50 days after exposure.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPHYLAXIS OF EXPOSED PERSONS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends persons who are not protected and are within 14 days of exposure receive a dose of single antigen hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin (IG). On June 27, 2007, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted to update the recommendations for hepatitis A post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) by stating healthy persons between the ages of 12 months and 40 years can receive single antigen hepatitis A vaccine or IG. For persons over the age of 40 years, IG is preferred; vaccine can be used if IG cannot be obtained. IG should be used for children under the age of 12 months, immune compromised persons, persons who have been diagnosed with chronic liver disease, and persons for whom vaccine is contraindicated.

A clinic has been scheduled for Saturday, February 9, 2008 from 4:00 p.m. to midnight, at the Erie Community College (ECC) North Campus, Building S cafeteria, to provide post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for exposed persons. Additional clinic hours will be available at this same location on Sunday, February 10, 2008 from noon to 8:00 p.m. Additional clinics may be scheduled based upon need. Persons who have been vaccinated for hepatitis A or have had the illness in the past are protected from hepatitis A infection, and there is no need for further action.

Those persons eligible for vaccination or immune globulin (IG) at the ECDOH clinic **must meet ALL of the following requirements:**

1. Purchased fresh produce (raw fruits and vegetables), either loose or in a perforated container, at the Wegmans Food Market located at 5275 Sheridan Drive, Williamsville, NY between January 7th and February 8th,
- AND**
2. Ate this produce raw or uncooked on or after January 30, 2008,
- AND**
3. No prior history of immunization against hepatitis A or diagnosis of hepatitis A infection.

DIAGNOSIS

The ECDOH is asking providers to consider hepatitis A infection when evaluating any patient with jaundice with or without abdominal pain, fever, nausea, and/or diarrhea. Hepatitis A infection should also be considered for persons without jaundice who present with abdominal pain, fever, nausea, and/or diarrhea and have a history of consuming uncooked produce purchased from January 7, 2008 through February 8, 2008 at the above Wegmans location. For symptomatic persons, physicians should order serologic tests for hepatitis A virus (HAV) (total and immunoglobulin (Ig) M antibody, available commercially). Testing is not recommended for asymptomatic persons. Due to the possibility of false positive results, serologic tests for HAV should not be used to identify infection in those exposed who consumed the potentially contaminated produce but have no symptoms. However, for exposed patients under the age of 6 with milder symptoms, especially those in daycare or school settings, testing should be considered. Positive anti-HAV IgG and negative IgM anti-HAV indicates past infection or vaccination and immunity.

REPORTING

Providers are asked to report ECDOH at (716) 858-7697 or the local health department where the patient resides any one presenting with symptoms consistent with hepatitis A and a history of consuming the potentially contaminated produce. Confirmed or suspected cases of hepatitis A infection in a food worker should be reported immediately.

ADDITIONAL CONTROL MEASURES

Good personal hygiene including hand washing and proper sanitation can help prevent hepatitis A. Outbreaks of hepatitis A are relatively uncommon in the United States; however, when they occur, public health efforts are required for their control.

Wegmans has voluntarily removed potentially affected produce from shelves and is sanitizing the sales area. Customers should dispose of affected products at home.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information regarding hepatitis A, post-exposure prophylaxis and routine vaccinations is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/a/index.htm> or www.erie.gov/health Clinicians may also contact the ECDOH at (716) 858-7697 for information.

Non-medical persons who may have been exposed to hepatitis A may call the NYSDOH Call Center at 1-800-808-1987 for additional health-related information or Wegmans at 1-800-564-8260 for product related information.

Health Category Definitions:

Health Alert FLASH: conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

Health Alert Priority: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary