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To: Wisconsin Department of Corrections and Local Jails

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Preventing Hepatitis A Outbreaks in Jails

Outbreaks of hepatitis A have been reported across the U.S., including some of Wisconsin's neighboring states. During these outbreaks, thousands of individuals have become ill. Because some outbreaks of hepatitis A are occurring in jail settings, we are encouraging you and your staff to take precautions to reduce the chance of a hepatitis A outbreak.

Who is at high risk in a jail setting?

Individuals in correctional and jail settings are at risk for becoming sick with hepatitis A due to the close living conditions which allows the virus to spread easily. Additional at-risk groups include:

- People who use drugs, whether injected or not (for example, cigarettes, joints, vaping products, pills).
- People who have experienced unstable housing or homelessness.
- People who have sexual contact with someone who has hepatitis A (for example, engaging in oral-anal sex also known as "rimming").
- Men who have sex with men.
- People who have close person-to-person contact with someone who has hepatitis A (for example, those who share a cell or bathroom facilities).
- People with chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C.

What is hepatitis A and how is it spread?

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious disease that is spread from person to person and is found in the feces (poop) of people with hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A can be easily spread if someone does not wash his or her hands properly after using the bathroom. Hepatitis A is different from hepatitis B and hepatitis C. While all three can damage the liver, they are caused by different viruses and are spread in different ways. Most often we see hepatitis A spread by eating or drinking food or water with the virus in it. In recent outbreaks, hepatitis A has been spread by sharing drugs or drug products, or having sexual contact with someone with hepatitis A.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms usually start four weeks after the individual has come in contact with the hepatitis A virus. However, they can start as early as two and as late as seven weeks after the virus enters the body. Symptoms can start quickly and can include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine (pee)
- Diarrhea (loose stools)
- Clay-colored stools
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

What can you do to help prevent an outbreak?

- Vaccinate all inmates and correctional staff with hepatitis A vaccine. This is the most effective way to prevent an outbreak in your jail and community.
 - Implementing a vaccine program on intake is one approach to ensure everyone is vaccinated.
 - Correctional staff can visit their health care provider to receive the hepatitis A vaccine.
- Provide clean towels and soap to all inmates.
- Encourage regular handwashing before eating. **Alcohol-based hand gel does not kill the hepatitis A virus. Soap and water must be used.**
- Ensure kitchen staff is healthy and vaccinated. They can cause or further spread an outbreak if they work when they are ill.
- Inmates should not share food, drinks, utensils, or personal hygiene items.

Why should you take action?

Hepatitis A outbreaks in jail settings are extremely disruptive to the day-to-day operations of jails and correctional facilities. In addition, when a sick inmate is released, they re-enter the community and can spread hepatitis A to others. You are helping to protect the community from a hepatitis A outbreak.

What should you know about the hepatitis A vaccine?

The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and an effective tool for preventing the spread of disease. It is important to use the single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine when vaccinating inmates and correctional staff. One dose of single-antigen hepatitis A vaccine has been shown to control outbreaks of hepatitis A. **It provides up to 95% protection against hepatitis A in healthy individuals for up to 11 years.**

Where to find more information:

- [Contact your local health department.](#)
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released a [health alert network](#) (HAN) message discussing the importance of prevention.
- The CDC provides regular web updates on the [status of ongoing outbreaks](#).
- The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) [hepatitis A webpage](#) includes general information about hepatitis A disease and the vaccine as well as educational resources.