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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN BREVARD OPENS SATURDAY HEPATITIS A VACCINATION CLINICS



Contact:

Anita Stremmel
Anita.Stremmel@flhealth.gov
321-615-9323

Viera, Fla.—Brevard County is continuing to see an increase in cases of hepatitis A locally and wants to encourage residents to get vaccinated for the virus. To help, the Department of Health in Brevard County is holding Saturday clinic hours during the month of March for hepatitis A vaccinations only (March 7, 14, 21, & 28, from 9:00AM to 11:00AM at its Melbourne (601 E University Blvd) and Viera (2555 Judge Fran Jamieson Way) clinics. Anyone who would like to receive the hepatitis A vaccine can come to the event to get the shot for free.

The department recommends that individuals who are either high-risk for contracting the virus or high-risk for serious complications from the virus get vaccinated. This includes (but isn't limited to) individuals who:

- Use injected or illicit drugs.
- Are experiencing homelessness.
- Are diagnosed with underlying liver disease.
- Work with homeless or intravenous drug users outside of a healthcare setting.
- Are over age 60 and have a serious underlying medical condition.
- Are first responders.
- Come into direct contact with others who have the virus.

The Department of Health in Brevard County has tracked 185 cases of the virus in the county between January 1, 2019 to February 8, 2020, the sixth highest number of cases in the state. The department has been offering free hepatitis A vaccinations since early 2019 to help combat the increase in cases locally. State Surgeon General Scott Rivkees, M.D., declared a [public health emergency](#) on August 1 in response to the hepatitis A outbreak in Florida.

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable illness that attacks the liver and can cause symptoms of abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, dark urine, and yellow skin and eyes. Symptoms typically last less than two months but can last up to six months. Individuals are contagious with the virus for up to two weeks before showing symptoms. Not everyone who becomes ill with the virus shows symptoms.

The virus spreads through the feces of people who have the virus. If a person with the virus doesn't wash their hands well after going to the bathroom, feces can get on their hands and can transfer to objects, food and drinks. When these things are shared, other people can unknowingly swallow the virus. If a person who has the virus comes in close contact or touches other people—this includes sex—the virus can also spread. This virus is hardy and can live on surfaces for more than a month.

The best way to prevent hepatitis A infection is through vaccination with the hepatitis A vaccine. It's also important to practice good hand hygiene, including thoroughly washing hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food, and to avoid sharing food, drinks, drugs or cigarettes. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer does not kill the hepatitis A virus.

Health care providers should immediately report all cases of hepatitis A to their local health department to ensure a quick public health intervention and prevent the spread of the disease among close contacts of the person sick with the virus.

For more information on hepatitis A, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav>. For more information on hepatitis A in Florida, visit [FloridaHealth.gov/HepA](https://www.floridahealth.gov/hepatitis).

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