

# Chief Health Officer Alert Hepatitis A Outbreak

Tuesday, 27 July 2010

**The Victorian Department of Health has been notified of a number of cases of hepatitis A in the Berwick area, in families associated with the Berwick Early Learning Centre. Please consider the diagnosis of hepatitis A in any person presenting with acute hepatitis, especially if they have links to the centre.**

Patients may present with symptoms such as loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, tiredness, fever, abdominal pain, dark urine, pale faeces and jaundice. The incubation period is 15 to 50 days, and transmission occurs via the faecal-oral route through the ingestion of contaminated food or water, or through direct hand-to-mouth contact with the faeces of an infectious case.

Cases are infectious **two weeks before and one week after** the onset of jaundice/dark urine. It is therefore important that close contacts receive post-exposure prophylaxis as soon as possible, and within 14 days after their last contact with the case during their infectious period.

These include:

- Household contacts (including people who have had an overnight stay at the case's house during their infectious period).
- Sexual contacts.
- People who have consumed food prepared by the case.

**Hepatitis A vaccine can be given as post-exposure prophylaxis for persons aged 2 years and over, and Normal Human Immunoglobulin (NHIG) for children under 2 years of age.**

Prophylaxis should be received by contacts within 14 days of their last contact with the infectious case. The department provides the first dose of hepatitis A vaccine or NHIG free of charge to contacts of hepatitis A cases. This can be arranged by the department and delivered to your practice during normal working hours. When you notify a case, further advice on prophylaxis will be provided.

**Food handlers, child care workers and health care workers should be excluded from work until one week after the onset of jaundice/dark urine.**

Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations* 2009, hepatitis A is required to be notified to the Department of Health by medical practitioners immediately by telephone on suspicion, followed by a notification in writing within 5 days.

Notifications can be made by telephone on 1300 651 160, or after hours on 1300 790 733.

Information about hepatitis A is available on our website:

- [www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/diseases/hepa](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/diseases/hepa)

Yours sincerely



Dr John Carnie  
Chief Health Officer