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Health Alert - Information from the Stoddard County Health Department

DECEMBER 18TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Dexter, Missouri - Huddle House in Dexter is safe for families to continue to dine and continue to dine in though they had a recent scare with an employee who was diagnosed with Hepatitis A. Every day in American you risk getting Hepatitis A if you eat out, walk in a retail store or touch a doorknob unless you are properly vaccination.

It's not a requirement in the state of Missouri to have a Hep A vaccination. It is however highly recommended for children and adults to get the vaccine.

"The Huddle House has been extremely cooperative and this could happen at any restaurant in any area," commented Amy Hector, R.N. and Public Health Program Director at the Stoddard County Public Health Department located in Bloomfield. "No other cases have been reported in Stoddard County, Missouri as of today."

The Stoddard County Health Department has sent out information to local providers, doctors, etc in the community who might medically review any potential cases. Again this is was an isolated case and thus far no one else has reported or been treated for Hepatitis A from this incident.

"There is also a case in Butler County, Missouri and several cases throughout the United States," continued Hector. "It's becoming more common and we always suggest getting the vaccination at a young age."

Anyone can get vaccinated especially those working in the food industry. Again it is not a requirement or state law in Missouri that food handler/preparation employees receive the vaccination.

Ways to get the vaccine:

- 1. Contact your Insurance Company and see if the vaccination is covered.**
- 2. Contact your provider/doctor and see if they carry the vaccination.**
- 3. Contact the local health department and see if they carry the vaccination.**

The Stoddard County Public Health Department does have the Hepatitis A vaccination available and it is a series of two shots six months apart. The cost is \$80 for both a vaccination and booster.

"There has been an increase in cases of Hepatitis A in recent months with large outbreaks occurring in California and Michigan as well as a local outbreak in Butler County," commented Hector.

"As reported in a press release by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Stoddard County has experienced our first case of Hepatitis A in a food service worker at a local restaurant. The Stoddard County Public Health Center is working closely with the restaurant to implement control measures to prevent further spread of the virus. The restaurant has been very cooperative and proactive and has expressed a strong desire to protect their customers from any illness. The employee was immediately excluded from work when symptoms developed and has not returned at this time.

What you should know about Hepatitis A:

*Hepatitis A is a vaccine preventable disease. If you have been previously immunized, you should be protected against this virus. The best way to prevent a disease for which a vaccine exists, is to get the vaccine before you are exposed. The CDC recommends vaccination to the following groups:

- All children at age 1 year,
- Persons who are at increased risk for infection,
- Persons who are at increased risk for complications from hepatitis A, and

- Any person wishing to obtain immunity (protection).

*Early symptoms of Hepatitis A are fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, malaise, and joint pain – these are also the symptoms for many other illness we see this time of year. Later symptoms include dark colored urine, jaundice, and clay colored stool which indicate damage to the liver. If you are having symptoms of liver damage, contact your physician immediately for evaluation and avoid contact with others until Hepatitis A can be ruled out. Symptoms can take 2-7 weeks to appear and most people are infectious in the 2 weeks prior and 1 week after onset of jaundice.

*Vaccination beyond 2 weeks of exposure does not prevent illness.

*Laboratory testing will not detect disease before onset of symptoms. If you are not having symptoms, lab results will be negative so testing without symptoms does not provide any helpful information.

*Good handwashing practices are a very important prevention measure for Hepatitis A and many other communicable diseases. It may be the single most important thing you can do to keep yourself healthy.

*There is no specific treatment for Hepatitis A. Symptoms usually last less than 2 months and most people recover completely with no lasting liver damage.

If you any questions or concerns, contact your physician or your local health department.

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