



County of San Diego

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PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

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TO: Faith Based Organizations
Volunteer Service Organizations

FROM: Wilma J. Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., Public Health Officer
Director, Public Health Services

PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS: SERVING THE COMMUNITY AND PREVENTING HEPATITIS A

As many organizations prepare to share holiday meals with homeless and low-income families, the County of San Diego wants to assure that you have your questions answered about how to best protect your membership, volunteers, and guests from potentially spreading the hepatitis A virus, while maintaining your traditions of hospitality and generosity.

San Diego is fortunate to have a diversity of many churches, mosques, and synagogues, as well as other faith-based and volunteer service organizations, to share good will with our neighbors through the November and December holidays. As you may be aware, the County is currently investigating a large outbreak of hepatitis A. The disease is a contagious liver infection that is spread when a person ingests food or water that has been contaminated by the feces of an infected person (i.e., touching objects or eating food that someone with hepatitis A handled).

Volunteers who are not usually in frequent and close contact with homeless individuals, and who participate only for special events and holidays, do not need to be vaccinated, unless they have other risk factors. Please see the Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on our website located at sandiegocounty.gov/HepA. In addition, along with this letter, we are providing a list of resources about hepatitis A. Please call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org for more information.

Who is recommended for the hepatitis A vaccine?

The current outbreak has primarily affected homeless people and illicit drug users. Volunteers who participate only for special events and holidays do not need to be vaccinated for these few occasions. Volunteers who work frequently and closely with homeless persons, especially volunteers who clean kitchens and bathrooms, are recommended to get the hepatitis A vaccine. **We recommend vaccine for these at-risk individuals.** A full list of the groups recommended for vaccine can be found on the enclosed document, as well as on the County of San Diego website: http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/dc/Hepatitis_A/vaccine.html.

The Public Health Services department, in the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, strongly recommends your organization and volunteers follow the steps below to help prevent the spread of hepatitis A:

- **Practice safe food handling practices.**
 - All volunteers should follow safe food handling practices, including washing hands with soap and water before preparing, serving, or eating food and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
 - Wearing disposable gloves, while preparing and serving food, is highly recommended. Wash your hands before putting on the gloves.
 - Volunteers who have cuts or rashes on their hands should cover all open wounds with appropriate bandages and should wear disposable gloves on top. Wearing gloves does not replace proper hand washing.
 - Volunteers should not prepare or serve food if they are ill.
- **Remind staff and volunteers of the importance of handwashing.**
 - Wash your hands with soap and water before preparing, serving, or eating food and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
 - Wash for 20 seconds or as long as it takes to sing “happy birthday” twice.
 - Waterless hand sanitizers are not effective against hepatitis A virus.

For additional information about the outbreak and associated resources, please go to sandiegocounty.gov/HepA where you will find the most recent hepatitis A case counts, press releases, FAQs, and other resources.

Thank you for your continued presence and contributions to our community. We wish you and yours a very safe, happy and healthy holiday season.


WILMA J. WOOTEN, M.D., M.P.H.
Public Health Officer
Director, Public Health Services

Attachment



PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS: SERVING THE COMMUNITY AND PREVENTING HEPATITIS A

- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Volunteers (Insert Link)
- The County's hepatitis A website, sandiegocounty.gov/HepA, which includes:
 - *Hepatitis A Fact Sheets* in five different languages: [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [Arabic](#), and [Vietnamese](#)
 - Post the *Hepatitis A Handwashing Poster* in bathrooms and kitchens. The poster is available in English and Spanish
http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/Epidemiology/HW_Vertical_Eng.pdf
- The Department of Environmental Health website, <http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/deh/fhd/food/whatsnew.html> has information on safe food handling practices, which includes:
 - *Hepatitis A Disinfection Guidelines* in six different languages: [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Tagalog](#), [Arabic](#), [Farsi](#) and [Vietnamese](#).
 - *Food Safety Guide for Non-Profit Organizations that Distribute Food*
http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/deh/fhd/food/pdf/publications_npofood_distribution.pdf

Who Should Get the Hepatitis A Virus Vaccine?

Due to the [current outbreak](#), the San Diego County Public Health Officer strongly recommends the following groups be vaccinated with the hepatitis A vaccine:

- People who are homeless.
- Users of illegal drugs.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People with chronic liver disease, such as cirrhosis, hepatitis B, or hepatitis C. They may not be at increased risk of getting hepatitis A but are at increased risk of poor outcomes if infected.
- People who work with, provide services to, or clean up after the homeless and/or illegal drug users
- Food handlers who have adult clients. Food handlers are not at increased risk, but if infected can impact large number of people. Children get routine vaccinations for hepatitis A, so vaccination is not recommended for food handlers in schools unless they are in an at-risk group.
- Anyone who is concerned about hepatitis A virus exposure and wants to be immune. During the present outbreak, hepatitis A vaccine is not being recommended for general public.

In addition to several of the above groups, the CDC routinely [recommends vaccinations](#) for:

- People with clotting factor disorders.
- People who conduct laboratory research with the virus.
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common.
- People in close personal contact with adopted children from countries where hepatitis A is common.