

Get the Facts: Hepatitis A

Volunteers with Direct Contact

Who is at risk for hepatitis A?

The current hepatitis A outbreak in Chicago has primarily affected homeless people and illicit drug users. People who work closely and routinely with homeless persons, or who clean kitchens, bathrooms and streets shared by homeless persons, may also be at risk for getting this disease. Volunteers who are not usually in frequent and close contact with homeless individuals have a very low risk of getting hepatitis A.

Is it safe to volunteer this year and serve food to homeless people?

Yes! This outbreak should not interfere with your organization's traditions of hospitality. By using safe food handling practices, especially thorough handwashing before preparing and serving food, before eating and after using the bathroom, volunteers and clients can be protected from many contagious diseases.

What should volunteers do?

Everyone should wash their hands with soap and water before preparing, serving, and eating food. Handwashing is recommended after any activity that may contaminate hands. Volunteers should not work when they are sick. Volunteers should wear disposable gloves if they have any cuts, sores, or rashes on their hands, but wearing gloves does not replace handwashing because you could still touch a contaminated surface while wearing them.

Who should get vaccinated?

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.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A spreads by putting food or drink that has been in contact with the feces (poop) of an infected person. Hepatitis A can be spread by:

- Touching objects or eating food that someone with hepatitis A virus infection handled
- Having sex with someone who has hepatitis A virus infection
- Forgetting to wash your hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers.

Where can volunteers get more information about hepatitis A?

Talk to your doctor, call 311 or visit cityofchicago.org/hepatitisA