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HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
NEWS RELEASE



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Kent County Joins List of Counties Affected by Hepatitis A Outbreak**

**GRAND RAPIDS** – From August 1, 2016 to October 31, 2018 there have been 899 cases of hepatitis A reported in Michigan. The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) was recently notified of a fourth case among Kent County residents that is linked to this outbreak. Because this case was diagnosed within 100 days of a previous case, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) will now include Kent as part of the state’s outbreak jurisdiction.

MDHHS identifies geographic areas within the outbreak jurisdiction as those where there is a potential for ongoing transmission of hepatitis A.

“Kent County normally sees about one case of hepatitis A per year,” says Adam London, Administrative Health Officer at KCHD. “In 2018 we have had eight cases so far, including four of the same genotype. It is a reminder about how communicable this illness is and that we need to be vigilant about protecting ourselves and our loved ones.”

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. It is found in the feces (poop) of people infected with hepatitis A. It is spread by consuming contaminated food or water, during sex or from close contact with an infected person. The infection can range from a mild illness lasting several weeks to a serious condition lasting several months; some may die of liver failure.

People experiencing homelessness, using illegal drugs, men who have sex with men, people with underlying liver disease and people who are in close contact with anyone in these groups, are at higher risk and should be vaccinated. Vaccination is the best method for prevention but proper handwashing with soap and water after using the bathroom and before eating or drinking is essential to stop the virus from spreading.

High risk individuals should contact their healthcare provider to discuss their options and be vaccinated. KCHD can provide vaccination for uninsured and underinsured people. Please call 616-632-7200 for vaccine information.

KCHD has produced [this video](#) with more information. Additional resources can be found at <https://www.accesskent.com/Health/CommDisease/hepatitis-a.htm>.

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 265 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit [www.accesskent.com/health](http://www.accesskent.com/health).

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