



## JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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### **Hepatitis A: What You Need to Know**

In recent months, the numbers of Hepatitis A Virus infections have increased in several parts of the United States. In Alabama, 132 cases have been reported as of August 14th, 2019.

Jefferson County now joins several other counties as being declared an outbreak county by the [Alabama Department of Public Health \(ADPH\)](#) with three total cases being reported. ADPH has set the threshold for the designation of an outbreak county at three to allow for rapid use of resources and planning at the state and local level to prevent a larger outbreak from occurring.

### **Overview**

[Hepatitis A](#) is a highly contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. It can range from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months. Most people who get hepatitis A feel sick for several weeks, but they usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage. Hepatitis A rates have declined by more than 95% since the hepatitis A vaccine first became available in 1995.

### **Transmission/Exposure**

Hepatitis A usually spreads when a person unknowingly ingests the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated by small, undetected amounts of stool from an infected person. Hepatitis A can also spread from close personal contact with an infected person. Although anyone can get hepatitis A, certain groups of people are at [higher risk](#), such as:

- persons experiencing homelessness
- users of injection or non-injection drugs
- men who have sex with men
- those who have recently been incarcerated

## Symptoms

Older children and adults typically have symptoms. If symptoms develop, they can appear abruptly and can include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Diarrhea
- Changes of stool color
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

## Treatment/Prevention

[Handwashing](#) with soap and water after the use of the rest room and before handling any food is critical to stop the spread of the Hepatitis A virus. There is a [vaccine](#) available for the virus if you fall into the at-risk categories. The Jefferson County Department of Health urges those in a high-risk category to seek vaccination from their health care provider or local pharmacist. A doctor can determine if you have hepatitis A by discussing your symptoms and taking a blood sample.

[The Jefferson County Department of Health](#) can provide vaccines to those who do not otherwise have access to the vaccine through their providers. These will be offered free of charge through the end of September for Jefferson County residents.

For more general information about hepatitis A, click [here](#).