



## Hepatitis and Asthma Awareness Month

### Hepatitis Awareness

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness about viral hepatitis and the importance of prevention, testing, vaccination, and linkage to care. This year's spotlight in Los Angeles County (LAC) is on the ongoing [hepatitis A outbreak](#)<sup>1</sup>, which has disproportionately impacted vulnerable communities, including people experiencing homelessness and people who inject drugs (PWID). As we observe Hepatitis Awareness Month, Public Health is promoting hepatitis A vaccination and education efforts to prevent further transmission and protect those most at risk.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) is taking a multi-pronged approach to control and prevent the spread of hepatitis A. Key activities include:

- **Enhanced Surveillance & Case Investigation:** Identifying cases in persons experiencing homelessness early, so they can be offered appropriate housing while infectious.
- **Mobile Vaccination Access:** The County's mobile vaccine team (MVT) is offering hepatitis A vaccinations to individuals at increased risk for hepatitis A infection.
- **Health Promotion and Provider Education:** Providing educational materials and guidance for healthcare providers on testing, vaccination, and outbreak management.
- **Hygiene Promotion:** Supporting community partners in improving access to sanitation, including handwashing stations and restroom facilities.

### Hepatitis B and C

While hepatitis A remains the focus this month, we must not forget about hepatitis B and C, which together account for the majority of chronic viral hepatitis infections in the United States.

- **Hepatitis B (HBV)** is a bloodborne virus, primarily spread through contact with infected blood or bodily fluids, through sexual contact, sharing needles or syringes, or from mother to child during childbirth. It can lead to lifelong infection, cirrhosis, and liver cancer. It is preventable through a safe and effective vaccine. Routine infant and adult vaccinations are key to reducing transmission, particularly in communities with higher rates of HBV such as Asian and Pacific Islander populations. Individuals with chronic HBV infection need lifelong monitoring of their infection to prevent complications.

- Hepatitis C (HCV) is also a bloodborne virus, primarily spread through injection drug use or unsafe medical practices. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but it is curable with antiviral treatment. Many people living with hepatitis C do not know they are infected, making testing and linkage to care essential.

As part of its broader efforts to eliminate hepatitis, Public Health continues to partner with community clinics and harm reduction programs to provide screening, vaccination, and treatment for hepatitis B and C.

### **Asthma Awareness**

May is also Asthma Awareness Month. Asthma is a severe, chronic lung disease that causes the airways in a person's lungs to swell and produce excess mucus, making it difficult to breathe. The primary symptoms of asthma include wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness.

Asthma affects 1 in 7 Californians<sup>ii</sup>. There is no cure for asthma, but it can be controlled. Everyone with asthma should work closely with their healthcare provider to learn about medicines that may prevent or relieve symptoms and episodes, and how to avoid their asthma triggers. People with asthma can live healthy, active lives when they take steps to manage their condition.

#### **What are the Causes and Risk Factors for Developing Asthma?**

The causes of asthma are not fully understood and vary from person to person. Genetics and exposure to certain things in a person's environment are factors that make a person at risk for developing asthma, and may include:

- Family History – People with a parent with asthma are more likely to develop asthma than someone who does not have a parent with asthma.
- Allergies – People who have asthma often have other types of allergies, including food or pollen allergies.
- Viral infections – Catching viral infections that affect breathing, such as colds, flu, or sinus infections, can be a risk factor for asthma.
- Occupational hazards – People who work in workplaces where they are exposed to chemical fumes, vapors, and industrial or wood dusts are at higher risk of developing asthma.
- Smoking – People who are exposed to cigarette smoke, whether through first-, second, or thirdhand smoke, are at higher risk of developing asthma.
- Environmental factors – Things in a person's environment can be asthma triggers. Common environmental asthma triggers include mold, air pollution, smoke, and pests.
- Social Determinants of Health – Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) are the non-medical factors that influence a person's health. These include income, access to education, access to quality healthcare, and living conditions in the neighborhood or home where someone lives. Low income and poor access to services, such as

education and health care, can contribute to more asthma symptoms, emergency room visits, and hospitalizations.

### **Asthma Action Plan**

An asthma action plan is a written document that helps individuals manage and control asthma symptoms independently. All people with asthma should have an asthma action plan. A health care provider works with patients with asthma to create an individualized asthma action plan, which includes instructions on:

- What medications to take, how often, and how to take them
- What to do when asthma is well-controlled
- What to do to keep asthma from getting worse, and
- What to do in an asthma emergency.

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/phcommon/public/media/mediapubhpdetail.cfm?prid=5025>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DEODC/EHIB/CPE/Pages/Asthma.aspx>