The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Department of Public Health

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| **CHARLES D. BAKER**  **Governor**  **KARYN E. POLITO**  **Lieutenant Governor** | **Clinical Advisory**  **April 2, 2018** | **MARYLOU SUDDERS**  **Secretary**  **MONICA BHAREL, MD, MPH**  **Commissioner** |

**Hepatitis B Outbreak in Bristol County Associated with Injection Drug Use**

**The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) is alerting healthcare providers about increased hepatitis B transmission associated with injection drug use in Southeastern Massachusetts related to the ongoing epidemic of substance use.**

The MDPH has observed an increase in the number of cases of acute hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection reported in people who inject drugs in Bristol County. Many people who inject did not receive vaccination against hepatitis B as children and are at risk for infection. HBV is preventable, and given the statewide impact of the opioid use epidemic there is the potential for increasing incidence in other parts of the state.

MDPH asks Emergency Departments and all healthcare providers to increase vigilance for acute HBV infection in patients who report current or recent injection drug use. With respect to these patients, we remind you to:

1. Give hepatitis B vaccine to susceptible individuals (not previously infected or immunized) reporting injection drug use. Testing for immunity prior to immunization is not necessary. Concern about being able to complete the full series should not prevent the administration of a first dose. Even a partial series of hepatitis B vaccine provides some seroprotection.
2. Remain alert to the potential for acute HBV infection in people who inject drugs and offer HBV testing to symptomatic patients;
3. Refer patients who use injectable substances to substance use disorder treatment and harm reduction services in your community; and
4. Report all cases of suspected acute HBV infection to MDPH promptly with as much risk history, clinical, and demographic data as you can obtain.

Background: With improved childhood vaccination, acute HBV infection has become less frequent in Massachusetts, with an annual average number of cases for 2010-2016 of 132 statewide. In 2017, there were 32 acute cases reported from Bristol County, a 78% increase over the County’s annual average. Twenty-two of the cases were in individuals known to inject drugs and/or had tested positive for hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. Most of the individuals are in their 30s and 40s and were likely not to have been vaccinated as children.

The potential for HBV transmission among people who inject drugs has always been a concern. There is now renewed concern due to the current opioid use epidemic. There is also risk for hepatitis C virus (HCV) and HIV transmission related to ongoing sharing of injecting equipment. The introduction of fentanyl into the drug supply leads to more frequent injection, amplifying the risk.

CDC’s clinical guidance related to HBV infection and its prevention through hepatitis B vaccination can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/vaccadults.htm>

For current listings of substance use disorder treatment programs:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/substance-abuse/providers/substance-abuse-services.html>

For a current listing of syringe and needle exchange programs:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/id/hiv-aids/>

**For questions, or to report a case of acute HBV infection to the MDPH, call the Epidemiology Program at 617-983-6800.**