

September 3, 2010

Confirmed Lethbridge-area hepatitis A case prompts public alert

CALGARY – Alberta Health Services has confirmed a case of hepatitis A in a food handler working at the Scenic Drive McDonald's located at 217 3rd Avenue South, in Lethbridge, Alberta.

Patrons who consumed food or beverage from the Scenic Drive McDonald's from August 20th to 22nd inclusive may have been exposed to hepatitis A. AHS will be offering hepatitis A vaccine to all patrons who consumed food or beverage from this location on those dates.

In Calgary, hepatitis A vaccination clinics will be held this weekend for anyone who was in Lethbridge and consumed food or beverage at the McDonald's Scenic Drive location on Saturday, August 21 or Sunday, August 22. The Calgary clinics will be held at the South Calgary Health Centre, 31 Sunpark Plaza S.E. on Saturday, September 4 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Sunday, September 5 from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m.

In Lethbridge, hepatitis A vaccination clinics will be held at the West Pavilion of the Lethbridge Exhibition Park on Friday, September 3 from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday, September 4 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Sunday, September 5 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Individuals who consumed food or beverage from the Scenic Drive McDonald's on Friday, August 20, Saturday, August 21 and Sunday, August 22 are eligible to receive vaccine at the Lethbridge clinic.

Because vaccine is only effective if administered within 14 days of exposure to an infected individual, AHS will be offering vaccine on these above noted days only.

"While we believe the risk to the public is low, hepatitis A is a serious infection," says Dr. Lorne Clearsky, Medical Officer of Health, Alberta Health Services – South Zone. "A vaccine administered within 14 days of exposure can greatly reduce the risk for patrons who consumed food or beverages at this location during this timeframe."

"Given that summer is a busy time for travel between Lethbridge and other Southern Albertan communities, AHS has decided to open the Calgary-area clinic to ensure the hepatitis A vaccine is more accessible for those outside of the Lethbridge-area."

Individuals who have had hepatitis A infection in the past or who have previously received two doses of hepatitis A vaccine are not at risk of infection.

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by a virus common in many parts of the developing world. Spread through the fecal-oral route, individuals primarily contract hepatitis A through direct contact with an infected person; however individuals can also contract the illness indirectly by ingestion of contaminated food or water. If an infected individual does not properly wash his/her hands after using the washroom, the virus can be transmitted through food and beverage prepared by the infected individual.

Illness can occur within 15 to 50 days after exposure to the virus, but usually within 28 to 30 days. Individuals can be infectious one to two weeks before symptoms occur until at least one week after the onset of illness. Symptoms of hepatitis A may include: tiredness; poor appetite;

nausea and vomiting; abdominal pain and fever; followed by dark-coloured urine, light-coloured stools, and yellowing of eyes and skin several days later. Some people, especially young children, may get hepatitis A infection without noticing any symptoms, however they are still infectious to others.

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A. However, it can be prevented with the use of hepatitis A vaccine. It is also important to wash hands well with soap and water before preparing or consuming foods.

Dr. Judy MacDonald, Medical Officer of Health, Calgary-Zone will be available to speak with Calgary-area media today (Friday) at 3 p.m. at the Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre, just outside the east entrance doors.

For more information on hepatitis A, residents can contact HealthLink Alberta to speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 403-943-LINK (5465) or toll-free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

- 30 -

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