

Free Hepatitis A vaccines given to Soup Kitchen Volunteers & Guests for Hepatitis Awareness Month

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver which can lead to damage that affects its ability to function properly. It is most often caused by a virus but can also be caused by autoimmune conditions, heavy alcohol use, medications, and toxins. Symptoms are usually similar for each type and may include one or more of the following: **fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, dark urine or light-colored stools, joint pain, yellow skin or eyes.**

The most common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. They are spread in different ways and have different treatments; some are more serious than others. Information specific to each type is presented at right. Highly effective and safe vaccines are available for hepatitis A and B. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

The Knox County Health Department came to the Soup Kitchen on May 23 to administer the first dose of Hepatitis A vaccine to all volunteers and any guests that wanted to receive it, at no charge.* About 70 vaccines were given. Thanks to Parish Health Team members and Mary Cartwright for their efforts to make this a success!

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Parish Health Ministry Team

*The Knox County Health Department will administer Hep A vaccines at the BOH Sharing Shop on June 27.



Hepatitis A

Overall, cases have declined since 1995 when the hepatitis A vaccine became available. Multiple outbreaks have been reported in recent years, including in East Tennessee. Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool and blood of an infected person. It is very contagious and can be spread before a person feels sick. It is spread when someone ingests the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated with unseen amounts of stool. Even microscopic amounts of stool from an infected person can cause infection if ingested. People who get hepatitis A may feel sick for a few weeks to several months but usually recover completely and have no lasting liver damage. In rare cases, it can become more serious. **No specific treatment is available for hepatitis A.**

Hepatitis B

It is estimated that 850,000 people in the US have chronic hepatitis B. Hepatitis B virus is spread when blood, semen, or other bodily fluid from an infected person enters someone not infected. (Primarily through birth, sexual contact, sharing needles, or needlesticks or other sharps injuries.) Acute hepatitis B is a short-term infection (first 6 months). Some adults are able to clear it and may have few to mild symptoms. Chronic hepatitis B refers to lifelong infection. Likelihood of this depends on the age at which infection occurs. Up to 90% of infected infants will develop chronic infection, but only 5% of adults will. Chronic infection can lead to serious health problems including cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death. **No specific treatment is available for acute infections. Antivirals may be used to treat some with chronic hepatitis B.**

Hepatitis C

75% of people in the U.S. with hepatitis C were born between 1945-1965, which is why all baby boomers should be tested. It is the leading cause of liver cancer and top cause of liver transplants. Hepatitis C is spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of someone not infected, most often through sharing needles to inject drugs. Before 1992 (when widespread screening of blood supply began), it was also spread through transfusions and transplants. Sexual transmission is possible. Tattoos and body piercings in unlicensed facilities or informal settings are other potential sources. Acute hepatitis C can range from mild illness to serious. About 20% of people are able to clear it in the first 6 months. Unfortunately, most people develop chronic hepatitis C. **New treatments exist that can cure >90% of people infected, but at a cost of \$1,100 per tablet.**
