**FROM THE PARISH HEALTH MINISTRY TEAM**

**May is Hepatitis Awareness Month** – Free Hepatitis A vaccines given to Soup Kitchen Volunteers & Guests!

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, have different treatments, and some are more serious than others. Information specific to each type is presented below. 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!

**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 they feel 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 body 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 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 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 for acute infections. Antivirals may be used to treat some with chronic hepatitis B.**

**Hepatitis C**

75% of people in US with Hepatitis C were born between 1945-1965, which is why **all “baby boomers”** **should get tested**. It is the leading cause of liver cancer and #1 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 of needles to inject drugs. Before 1992 (when widespread screening of blood supply began), it was also spread through transfusions and organ transplants. Sexual transmission is possible. Tattoos and body piercings in unlicensed facilities or informal settings are other potential sources.

**Acute Hep 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.**

Vicky Shelton, D.Ph.

CSUMC Parish Health Team, 2019