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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hepatitis A Outbreaks in California Counties

[Ventura County, CA] – Hepatitis A virus (HAV) outbreaks have occurred in San Diego and Santa Cruz counties. On September 17, 2017, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health declared an outbreak of HAV in Los Angeles County, indicating the outbreak is at high-risk of moving into Ventura County.

The large majority of cases have occurred in persons who are homeless and/or use illicit drugs (injection and non-injection), with several cases also occurring among people who provide services to the homeless.

To date there have been no cases linked to this outbreak in Ventura County. Given the potential for spread, Ventura County Public Health (VCPH) has been closely monitoring the situation since July, and preparing for the possibility of an outbreak in our county. Our priorities are to do all we can to prevent the outbreak by keeping the community informed of the situation and provide vaccination to at-risk populations.

“Vaccination is the best protection against hepatitis A. With this in mind, clinics throughout the county are able to offer vaccine to persons who are homeless, active drug users, and those who provide services and support to those individuals,” said Dr. Robert Levin, Ventura County Public Health Officer.

A person can get hepatitis A if they come into contact with an infected person’s feces through contaminated food or objects, including the environment. The hepatitis A virus can spread when a person does not properly wash their hands after going to the bathroom or changing diapers. Hepatitis A will not pass through intact skin. Other modes of transmission include certain sexual practices and other close contact, sharing equipment related to illicit drug use, and consumption of food or water contaminated with the virus. People who are homeless are at higher risk because they face challenges with maintaining good hygiene.

Physicians are required to report HAV cases to the Communicable Disease Office at Ventura County Public Health. HAV causes acute liver disease, which may be severe. Signs and symptoms of acute HAV include fever, malaise, dark urine, lack of appetite, nausea, and stomach pain, followed by jaundice (or yellow eyes). Symptoms generally last for less than 2 months although some persons may have prolonged or more severe illness. Infection can be prevented in close contacts of patients by vaccination or administration of immune globulin within 2-weeks following exposure. If you experience these symptoms, contact your physician.

Although hepatitis A is very contagious, the public is encouraged to take the following steps to prevent hepatitis A:

- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A
- Don't have sex with someone who has hepatitis A infection
- Use your own towels, toothbrushes and eating utensils
- Don't share food, drinks, or smokes with other people
- Wash hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing, serving or eating food.

VCPH continues surveillance for cases and is working closely with healthcare providers and organizations that serve high-risk HAV population to protect the health of clients, staff and the community. High risk groups and those that work with this population are encouraged to get Hepatitis A vaccination from their health care provider.

For more information on hepatitis A, visit:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/Hepatitis-A.aspx>.

About VCPH: Nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board, Ventura County Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of our residents. To learn more about Ventura County Public Health, please visit <http://www.vchca.org/agency-divisions/public-health>.