

Environmental Assessment— Hepatitis A



Hepatitis A is a highly contagious virus that infects the liver and can be preventable by vaccine. Contamination usually occurs via an ill individual but may also be introduced into the kitchen environment through contaminated food, water, or food contact surfaces.

Some key items to focus on while investigating a suspected hepatitis A contamination:

- **Visit establishment ASAP**—Prompt investigation and reporting are critical for identifying the cause. Ask management about any recent employee illness including diarrhea, vomiting and jaundice, and ask to review the illness log.
- **Observe hand hygiene**—Are handwashing, disposable gloves use and handwashing sinks in compliance?
- **Exclusion and return to work**—Has the ill worker been excluded, and does management know when the employee can return to work? A field epidemiologist or medical personnel will provide the return-to-work date.
- **Determine ill worker’s work schedule and duties**—Provide information for the past three weeks and determine whether the worker handled any ready-to-eat (RTE) food. Discard any remaining contaminated food, including ice from an ice machine.
- **Hepatitis A factsheets and educational materials**—Request that management share hepatitis A information with staff. The Indiana Department of Health can provide factsheets and public service announcements, if needed.
- **Clean and sanitize establishment**—The establishment must clean and sanitize all common touch surfaces, including the ice bin, door or faucet handles, tabletops, etc. Chlorine bleach can be used at 5,000 ppm (1 2/3 cup per 1 gallon of water) with a 1-minute contact time. Rinse with potable water afterwards. Food contact surfaces that have been disinfected must be washed, rinsed and sanitized prior to use.
- **Postexposure prophylaxis (PEP)**—The Epidemiology Resource Center (ERC) will provide guidance on whether PEP is beneficial for co-workers and/or customers.

When investigating hepatitis A exposures at a food establishment, focus on the employee illness policy, the ill employee’s duties and the bare hand contact and hand hygiene behavior of staff.

Indiana is a voluntary participant with the CDC’s National Environmental Assessment Reporting system (NEARS). Please visit the CDC’s [NEARS](#) website for more information. Please contact the Indiana Department of Health Food Protection Division Rapid Response Team for assistance with the environmental assessment and completing NEARS forms, sampling supplies and any other questions regarding the environmental response for a suspected hepatitis A contamination.

For assistance, please contact:
Tracy Hawkins, Rapid Response Team Epidemiologist
317-233-2170

