

Simple steps can help slow spread of hepatitis

DISEASE: Hand washing, immunizations and safer sex all contribute to stopping infection from hepatitis

By Ben Kwasney
Higher Education Reporter

An estimated 1.4 million cases of hepatitis A are reported worldwide each year. Lane County has one of the highest rates in the nation, said Dr. Paula Ciesielski, a physician at the Student Health Center. If students know the important facts, the numbers of hepatitis patients at the health center could go down.

What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis is the inflammation of the liver. There are three common types of hepatitis on campus: A, B and C. Types D and E are not common in the United States.

What are the symptoms?

Hepatitis A: Headache, fever and nausea with jaundice appearing 1-2 weeks later. The disease is more infectious in the early stages, and by the time jaundice appears, it's not as nearly infectious. The disease lasts 4-6 weeks, but symptoms only last 2-3 weeks.

Hepatitis B: Symptoms are the same as A. The only difference is the two-month incubation period

THE HEPATITIS QUIZ

Answer each of these questions as True or False:

- | | T | F |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Shaking hands with an infected person can put a person at risk of contracting hepatitis. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. Sharing razors and toothbrushes are safe as long as they are rinsed off first. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. Getting a tattoo can be a risk factor for contracting hepatitis B and C. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. More than 70 percent of intravenous drug users are infected with hepatitis C. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. Hepatitis B is approximately 100 times more infectious than the AIDS virus. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. If a parent with hepatitis B were to kiss an open wound of a child, the virus may be passed on. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. Soap and water kills the hepatitis B virus. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. Eating raw or undercooked shellfish from waters contaminated with the hepatitis A virus can infect a person with the virus. | ☐ | ☐ |

Answers: 1. false, 2. false, 3. true, 4. true, 5. true, 6. true, 7. false, 8. true.

Question data compiled from The Hepatitis Information Network.

EMERALD

chances of contracting through a blood transfusion are about one in 3,300. Sexual transmission can pass the disease on, but at low rates. High risk sexual behaviors, and intravenous drug use increase the risks of contracting the disease.

How is it prevented?

Hepatitis A: Hand washing, especially after using the restroom, is the most important means of preventing the spread of the disease. There is a vaccine given to people traveling to countries with high endemic rates, but no recommendations have been made that Lane County residents be routinely vaccinated, Ciesielski said.

Hepatitis B: An immunization of three shots is available and many newborns and adolescents have received the vaccination. Most people in the United States will soon be vaccinated against the disease.

Hepatitis C: There is no immunization available at this time. Preventative measures include low risk sexual behavior and refraining from using drug needles.

Dr. Paula Ciesielski, a physician at the Student Health Center, contributed information for this article.

cer can result from type C.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis A: The disease is transferred by the fecal/oral route.

Hepatitis B: Sexually transmitted and transmitted by needles used to inject drugs and blood transfusions.

Hepatitis C: It used to be passed on through blood transfusions, but now with tests to check blood the

compared to the two-week period of A. Hepatitis B usually lasts 4-6 weeks. Type B can also lead to chronic hepatitis and liver failure.

Hepatitis C: Often no symptoms result with this type, but patients infected with type C may experience low-grade fever and nausea. Carriers of C often become chronic carriers because the immune system has difficulty clearing it from the body. Cirrhosis and liver can-

Health workers fight hepatitis A with new vaccine

IMMUNIZATION: When hepatitis threatened her town, Linn Smith urged all food workers to get shots

By Karen Testa
The Associated Press

BRANSON, Mo. — Linn Smith watched warily for two years as a stubborn wave of hepatitis A washed across the Midwest, making its way toward Branson, where 60,000 tourists a day visit restaurants, ice cream stands and concession booths.

At the same time, she saw the needs of the U.S. military and a manufacturer's recall gobbling up the local supply of immune globulin or IG — medicine used to stifle hepatitis infec-

tions in exposed people.

Smith, head of Branson's health department, had good reason to fear the potentially explosive effects of the contagious disease among food-service workers: Through 1996, cases in southwestern Missouri rose almost 400 percent over those in 1995, to 637 from 127. And everyone who comes in contact with a carrier should have a shot of immune globulin.

"I truthfully thought, 'What am I going to do if I don't have any IG and they send me a war to fight?'" she said.

Late last year, she took up the only weapon she could find: a year-old vaccine gaining popularity across the country as other tourism-dependent communities consider mandatory im-

munization of food workers.

Hepatitis A, passed orally or through human waste, usually by people with poor personal hygiene, causes liver inflammation. Symptoms include fatigue, abdominal discomfort, vomiting, fever, dark urine and jaundice.

The disease runs in cycles, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sticking to one region for three years or so, then backing off for a decade or more.

Although food workers make up less than 5 percent of hepatitis A cases, the greater worry is exposure. A single infected worker can create a logistical nightmare when authorities try to warn people who had contact with him, especially if they are tourists on the move.

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