Hepatitis A
Guidance for Hospital Emergency Departments

What is Hepatitis A?
Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable communicable disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). Hepatitis A is transmitted person-to-person through the ingestion of food, water, or oral contact with objects contaminated with fecal matter from a Hepatitis A infected person. Hepatitis A is easily spread through close sexual and household contacts, as well as persons who share injection and non-injection drugs. The incubation period of Hepatitis A can be 15-50 days, with an average of 28 days.

Hepatitis A Outbreak
West Virginia is currently seeing an increase in Hepatitis A cases, primarily in Kanawha county. Cases have been linked to a nation-wide outbreak of HAV primarily among homeless or transient individuals and those who use injection or non-injection drugs. Cases in this outbreak have had:
- Hospitalization rates of approximately 70%
- High rates of Hepatitis B and C coinfections

Who Should be Screened?
- Persons with a history of substance abuse
- Persons currently homeless or in transient living
- Person with current or recent history of incarceration
- Men who have sex with men
- Persons with underlying liver disease

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis A?
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea or vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Pale stool
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)

What can providers do?
- Report all confirmed or suspected Hepatitis A causes to your local health department
- Inform patients that someone from the local health department will contact them for follow-up
- Prevent Hepatitis A through vaccination, standard precautions, and handwashing
- Promote vaccination for those exposed and anyone in a risk group

For more information, visit:
- www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav
- Or call your local health department

Adapted with permission from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services