

# Employees with Direct Contact with Homeless People

In Los Angeles County, there has been an increase in hepatitis A cases among homeless people and drug users. Employees that have direct contact with these groups are at risk for infection. This can include sanitation workers, janitors, social workers, or employees in homeless shelters. Other employees at risk include staff that clean up after homeless people or other positions that have direct contact with homeless people. This information can help you take steps to prevent the spread of hepatitis A and protect yourself from infection.

### 1. What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (germ) that is spread from person-to-person. Mild cases can last a few weeks while severe cases can last several months.

### 2. How does hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A spreads by putting something in your mouth (object, food, or drink) that has been in contact with the feces (poop) of an infected person.

Hepatitis A can be spread:

- When people don't wash their hands after contact with infected feces, like after using the bathroom or changing diapers
- By having sexual contact with an infected partner
- By consuming food or drinks that are contaminated by the virus

### 3. Am I at risk of getting hepatitis A?

Since there is an outbreak of hepatitis A among homeless people and active drug users in California, you are at risk if you have direct contact with these homeless people or drug users in your daily work. You are at risk if you:

- Provide medical or social services to these groups
- Clean public areas where homeless people sleep or use the restroom
- Work in homeless shelters or rehabilitation facilities

You are not at risk of infection if your work is mostly administrative (handling paperwork) and doesn't involve direct contact with homeless people or active drugs users. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have additional concerns.

### 4. How is hepatitis A treated?

Treatment includes rest, good nutrition, fluids, and medical monitoring. Some people may need to be hospitalized. Most people who get hepatitis A recover completely and don't have lasting liver damage.

### 5. How can employees who have direct contact with homeless people protect themselves from infection?

- Get vaccinated
- Wash hands with water and soap for 20 seconds on a regular basis, especially before eating or preparing food and after using the toilet



### Key Messages:

- Hepatitis A is highly contagious (spreads person-to-person).
- Get vaccinated by calling 2-1-1 to find a clinic in your area.
- Protect yourself by washing your hands and using contact precautions when treating patients with hepatitis A.

### Where can the public go for more information?

Los Angeles County,  
Department of Public  
Health  
Dial 2-1-1

California Department of  
Public Health  
916-558-1784

Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
800-CDC-INFO  
800-232-4636

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