

Clusters of acute hepatitis A among men who have sex with men

From February 2016 cases of confirmed hepatitis A - infected with three distinct strains of sub-genotype IA virus - have been reported by 13 EU countries. As of 14 March 2017 there have been a total of 79 confirmed cases belonging to these clusters reported across England, predominately among men who have sex with men (MSM). Recent cases among MSM have been seen in the South-West region including Plymouth, East Cornwall and Bournemouth; furthermore, there is potential evidence of transmission in Southampton, and clusters in nearby areas such as Portsmouth and London.

Public Health England is working with local GUM services and other stakeholders in an attempt to prevent ongoing transmission.

Vaccine recommendations

We would be grateful if opportunistic vaccination against hepatitis A and referral to GUM services is considered for all high risk MSM as follows: PHE, in collaboration with the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH), recommend offering opportunistic hepatitis A immunisation to at-risk MSM defined as: *MSM with at least one new or casual partner in the previous three months, in outbreak-affected areas* – for practical purposes in the South-West this will include high risk MSM resident in, or with social links to:

- Plymouth
- East Cornwall
- Exeter
- Torbay
- Bournemouth
- And those with links to other affected areas including Portsmouth, Southampton and London.

This is consistent with existing guidance from BASHH and Immunisation against Infectious Disease. (The Green Book).

In view of potential adult hepatitis A monovalent vaccine shortages and the need to maintain continuity of supply, if monovalent hepatitis A vaccine is not available then primary care, sexual health and HIV services are advised to offer combination hepatitis A/B vaccine, such as Twinrix[®], to avoid delayed immunisation. Combination hepatitis A/B vaccine is also preferred for those MSM who have no or incomplete hepatitis B immunisation. When Twinrix[®] is used for pre-exposure immunisation, the standard schedule is 0, 1 and 6 months but an accelerated schedule (0, 7, 21 days) can be used if rapid protection is required – for example impending travel (see Green Book).

Notification

Please could doctors be reminded to notify any *suspected or confirmed* cases of acute infectious hepatitis to the PHE South-West Health Protection Team on 0300 303 8162 option 1 option 1

For any further information please contact Dr Nick Young nick.young@phe.gov.uk or Kate Jordan kate.jordan@phe.gov.uk via email or on 0300 303 8162 option 1 option 1