

## **Single Overriding Communication Objective**

### **Key Message:**

The Thomas Jefferson Health Department (TJHD) was alerted on Saturday (June 10<sup>th</sup>) to 4 cases of hepatitis A virus. An investigation was launched immediately to determine the how these four individuals became infected with the virus. In addition to these four cases, six other individuals have been identified that developed symptoms of hepatitis. Although it is still too early to know for sure as how these individuals became infected, these 10 individuals, all University of Virginia students, dined at the Red Light Café on the evening of May 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Key Facts:**

1. The restaurant is fully cooperating in the investigation, which was initiated immediately upon notification of the illnesses.
2. The investigation is currently focused on identifying all individuals that may have contracted the illness, as well as administering preventive inoculations to close contacts of ill individuals.
3. Hepatitis A virus is a liver disease that is characterized by symptoms of tiredness, poor appetite, fever, and nausea; although most people recover in a few weeks without complications, the disease can be fatal in rare instances.

### **Target Audience:**

- Primary: Individuals and their close contacts that ate at the Red Light Café in Charlottesville any time around May 20, 2006
- Secondary: The general public in the community and surrounding areas that need to be aware of this health department investigation

### **Interview Objective:**

The health department (TJHD) is responding appropriately to this outbreak of hepatitis A and is not over-reassuring the community as to either the extent of the outbreak or the potentially serious consequences of contracting hepatitis A.

### **Primary Media Contact:**

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Date and Time available: August 16, 2006 at 2:00 pm

## Message Map for Questions

### 1. What can you tell me about outbreaks of Hepatitis A?

Although outbreaks of hepatitis A are relatively uncommon, the disease itself is fairly common.

- Hepatitis A (formerly known as infectious hepatitis) is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus and anyone can get hepatitis A
- The HAV enters through the mouth, multiplies in the body, and is passed in the stool
- The virus can be carried on an infected person's hands and spread by either direct contact or by consuming food/water handled by the individual

### 2. What is being done in response to this outbreak of hepatitis A?

We are working quickly control the situation and limit the spread of the illness

- Currently, we are assessing the extent of the outbreak, as well as identifying who the ill individuals are
- We are investigating potential sources of spread of the HAV
- We are determining which individuals are at increased risk for spreading the disease (food-handlers, staff/attendees of child care centers, medical providers)

### 3. How serious of a disease is hepatitis A?

Generally, the disease is what we term self-limiting, which means people recover without needing much treatment.

- Although most people recover in a few weeks without complications, the symptoms may last for two months
- Symptoms of hepatitis A include tiredness, poor appetite, fever, and nausea
- Even though most people recover, some people experience relapsing illness and if overwhelming liver failure occurs, the disease can be fatal

### 4. Can you assure our listeners that the outbreak is contained and no one else will get sick?

Of course, we wish that we could tell your listeners that the situation was completely resolved. Although we can not declare the situation resolved just yet, we can tell you that we are making significant progress.

- Currently, we have identified 21 individuals that have symptoms of illness consistent with HAV
- We have developed more leads and information regarding the potential source of the illness at the restaurant
- The real issue is that all necessary steps are being taken to limit the spread of this disease and so far, it does not appear to have spread into the community.

## **Main Messages Interviewee is Promoting**

1. The TJHD is following standard protocols to investigate these cases of hepatitis and to limit the spread of disease in the community; we do not know yet the full extent of how many people may have been exposed to hepatitis A virus.
2. We wish that we had all the answers regarding the source of the infections, as well as the number of people that may have contracted the illness. However, the investigation is in its preliminary stages and information is being gathered in order to better ascertain the nature of this outbreak of hepatitis.
3. We understand that people are concerned and anxious about these illnesses. We are encouraging people to stay informed on this situation and we will do everything that we can to provide the most current and complete information available.
4. We are taking all necessary steps to address the situation, which includes immunizing all potentially exposed food workers, as well as their co-workers; we are keeping possibly exposed workers off the job for a time until they are no longer contagious to other individuals.
5. Patrons of this restaurant, who believe themselves to be at risk from consumption of food at the restaurant, should check with their private physicians regarding receiving an injection of Immune Globulin, or call the health department at 434-972-6228.
6. Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. The disease is fairly common and is spread when uncooked food or beverage contaminated with the virus is ingested. It is also spread by direct contact with an infected individual.
7. People who develop hepatitis A almost always recover from the illness without further complications, even though people may experience a range of symptoms, including fever, tiredness, weakness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, jaundice and a yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes.
8. About 15% of people infected with hepatitis A will have prolonged or relapsing illness over a 6-9 month time period and (rarely) people die from overwhelming liver failure.
9. Hepatitis A can be prevented by careful hand washing after using the toilet or changing diapers and before eating or preparing food. Also, infected people should not handle foods during the contagious period.
10. The contagious period begins about two weeks before symptoms appear and the symptoms appear 2-6 weeks after exposures, but usually within 4 weeks.
11. Household members or others in close contact with an infected person should call a medical provider or the health department to determine if they should obtain a shot of Immunoglobulin (IG), which minimizes their chances of becoming ill.

## **Information Flier for Hepatitis A Outbreak**

On Saturday, June 10, 2006 the Thomas Jefferson Health District (TJHD) was alerted to a possible outbreak of Hepatitis A. The Emergency Department at the University of Virginia (UVA) Hospital had sent an emergency page to the TJHD at 9:55 pm. The page was returned at 9:57 pm by the district epidemiologist (DE).

The DE spoke with an attending physician at the UVA ED and learned that four individuals had presented to the Emergency Room (ER) in the last two hours with the following set of symptoms:

- Fever
- Dark-colored urine
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of eyes)
- Anorexia (poor appetite)
- Nausea
- Malaise

All four individuals were UVA students who had attended a graduation dinner on the evening of May 20<sup>th</sup> at the Red Light Café in Charlottesville, VA. The ill individuals indicated that they had several friends that were also ill with similar symptoms.

The UVA physician indicated that all four ill individuals had blood drawn to facilitate serologic testing to confirm the clinical diagnosis (signs/symptoms) of Hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection. The results would be available in approximately 24-36 hours.

The DE indicated that the situation warranted immediate attention and that he would be coming to the ER to conduct in-depth interviews with the four sick individuals. The DE phoned the District Health Director and informed her of the situation.

Interviews were conducted and it was confirmed that all four individuals had eaten at the Red Light Café on the evening of May 20<sup>th</sup>. Interviews provided contact information on 6 other individuals that had attended the graduation dinner at the restaurant.

On Sunday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, the DE and members of the District Epidemiology Response Team interviewed the 6 individuals. The interviews established that all six had eaten at the Red Light Café; all experiencing symptoms of fever, nausea, malaise, anorexia, and dark-colored urine. Local physicians were immediately notified of the situation (Blast Fax).

The Red Light Café was visited on Sunday afternoon and informed on the situation. All employees were interviewed and blood was drawn on each employee for HAV testing. The on-going investigation would focus on identifying all ill individuals and instituting appropriate prophylaxis for contacts. A press release was developed that described the current status of the investigation and was blast faxed to all media outlets in the TJHD on Monday June 12<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 am. The results of the blood tests would be available in approximately 24-36 hours.

## **List of Questions Reporter May Ask**

1. What can you tell me about outbreaks of hepatitis A?
2. What is being done in response to this outbreak of hepatitis A?
3. How many people have gotten hepatitis from this restaurant?
4. Has anyone died as a result of getting hepatitis from this restaurant?
5. How serious of a disease is hepatitis?
6. What is the worst case scenario?
7. Can you assure our listeners that the outbreak is contained and no one else will get sick?
8. Do any of the sick employees work at other food establishments that might also be at risk of making people sick?
9. How long will it be until the outbreak of hepatitis is over?
10. If the outbreak is not over, how can the situation be under control?
11. What are you advising people to do if they come down with symptoms of hepatitis?
12. Are my family and I safe from getting hepatitis when we eat out at a restaurant?
13. What can I do to protect myself and my family from getting hepatitis A?
14. What else can go wrong?
15. What are you not telling us that might be helpful to our listeners?
16. What can be done to prevent this from happening again?
17. What would you like to say to those that have gotten hepatitis A from this restaurant?
18. What is your personal opinion on what should be done to this restaurant for causing so much pain and suffering?
19. Who is going to reimburse all these ill people for expenses that they incurred as a result of getting hepatitis A from this restaurant?
20. What does this all mean?