California Introduces New Legislation After Hepatitis A Outbreak

The bill is intended to help local governments act more efficiently to future outbreaks.

February 5, 2019 By Casey Halter

After battling one of the nation's worst hepatitis A virus (HAV) outbreaks in 2017, lawmakers in California have introduced new legislation that would allow local health officials in cities like San Diego to take swifter action to address public health crises, KUSI News reports.

State Assemblymember Todd Gloria is sponsoring the bill, which would establish specific roles for local governments during disease outbreaks, allowing for a more streamlined response. This is after a state audit in December 2018 found multiple problems with San Diego's response to the 2017 outbreak—for example, not sharing location data between city and county until after the outbreak was in full swing and failing to act fast enough to prevent 20 deaths and nearly 600 illnesses as a result of the outbreak.

The new law, Assembly Bill 262, would require county health officials to promptly update and notify cities in their jurisdiction about any communicable diseases and share relevant data, such as the concentrations of cases and the number of people involved. The bill would also give health officials the authority to tell cities which steps to take to combat a crisis, reports KUSI News.

"I think these are commonsense provisions," said Gloria during a recent press conference about the bill. "I think it's frustrating that they weren't exercised during this outbreak. We want to make sure that in future outbreaks, common sense prevails and public health is protected and lives are ultimately saved."

The law is pending referral to the appropriate assembly committees for review. It will have to be passed in both houses of California's legislature to become law.

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