L.A. Opens Free Hygiene Center to Combat Hepatitis A

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Los Angeles has opened a hygiene center in its downtown “Skid Row” neighborhood in response to an ongoing hepatitis A virus (HAV) outbreak that has been spreading throughout homeless populations across the region, NBC Los Angeles reports.

Known as the Skid Row Community ReFresh Spot, the facility is a personal care center equipped with clean and safe showers and toilets for free use. L.A.’s city council hatched a plan to bring the hygiene center to Skid Row earlier this year, after reports that hepatitis A had begun to spike among homeless communities in Los Angeles, San Diego and Santa Cruz.

The facility aims to cut back on the number of new infections among people who do not have regular access to clean toilets or showers, since the liver virus thrives in unsanitary conditions and is primarily spread through contact with feces via unclean surfaces or sexual contact. A report released by the city last summer also found that only nine public toilets are accessible at night in all of Skid Row, where nearly 1,800 homeless people sleep.

Beyond the hepatitis A prevention focus, city health officials say increased access to safe, clean toilets and hot showers in the city will help give at-risk residents a sense of hope and dignity while also helping to stem the crisis.

During the month of December, ReFresh Spot will be open Tuesdays through Thursdays and Saturdays from 6 a.m. to noon. Over the next few months, the center will scale up to a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week operation staffed by security guards and homeless advocates.

Los Angeles is also continuing to offer free hepatitis A vaccinations and testing at Department of Health clinics across the city.

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