Michigan Attorney General Asked to Investigate Detroit Hepatitis A Outbreak

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State senator and Detroit mayoral candidate Coleman A. Young II is asking Michigan's attorney general to investigate the increase in hepatitis A virus (HAV) cases across the city and determine whether they're related to a series of water shutoffs in the city, The Detroit News reports.

So far, health officials have found no common source for the more than 100 hep A cases reported in the city since August 2016. In a press release issued last week, Young said he requested "a formal inquiry" on the matter from State Attorney General Bill Schuette on whether the outbreak may have something to do with the city's 83,000 residential water shutoffs over the last three years, though some public health experts have suggested such a link is unlikely. Schuette has yet to comment on the request.

Michigan Department of Health representatives say they have been working hard to raise awareness about hepatitis A, which can be spread via contact with objects, food or water contaminated by the feces of an infected person but can be prevented with a vaccine. Health officials say they have observed some associations with drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness with regard to the outbreak and are supporting vaccinations for these populations.

City health workers are also in direct consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is tracking a similar hepatitis A outbreak in California.

Hepatitis A vaccines are now being recommended for users of illegal drugs (both injectable and non-injectable), men who have sex with men, people with chronic liver disease, people treated with clotting-factor concentrates and travelers to countries with high rates of hepatitis A and the families of recent adoptees from such countries. The city reports that two people have died in Detroit's HAV outbreak since the summer.

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