Starbucks Employee Might Have Exposed Thousands to Hepatitis A Virus

Customers of the New Jersey Starbucks are urged to get vaccinated against hepatitis A, a virus that causes liver inflammation.

November 24, 2021 By Trent Straube

A New Jersey Starbucks worker tested positive for hepatitis A, a disease of the liver caused by hepatitis A virus and spread via contaminated food and drinks, reports CNN. Indeed, the employee handled food and therefore possibly exposed thousands of customers to the virus.

The Starbucks is located at 1490 Blackwood Clementon Road in Gloucester, and anyone who stopped by the coffee shop on November 4, 5, 6, 11, 12 and 13—the days of possible exposure—is urged to get vaccinated if they haven't already received the shots. Hep A vaccines consist of two shots, but the first offers an efficacy rate of over 94%.

Health officials in Camden County, where the Starbuck is located, tell NJ.com that nearly 800 people got vaccinated through their clinic over the weekend.

"That's a pretty good start," county spokesperson Dan Keashen told NJ Advance Media. "We've estimated the patron population exposed to be somewhere in the thousands but there's a lot of people already vaccinated. Anyone born (after 2000) has likely already been vaccinated and doesn't need another dose. So that's why we recommend people call their primary care physician or pediatrician first."

As of Monday, November 22, no one else has tested positive for hep A, according to Keashen.

Not every potential outbreak of hepatitis A ends so well. An outbreak of cases reported in the past month were traced back to August at three Famous Anthony's restaurants in Virginia. For details, see "3 Dead, 31 Hospitalized in Hepatitis A Outbreak at Restaurant Chain."

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A virus (HAV) is most commonly spread through food or water contaminated with trace amounts of feces containing the virus. Hep A is also spread through close personal contact with a person who has the virus, among other ways.

Hepatitis A is an acute form of hepatitis, meaning it is not chronic or long term (unlike hepatitis B and C). Once you've had hep A, you can't get reinfected. However, you can still contract hep B and

C.

The best way to prevent hep A is to get vaccinated. The shot is safe and effective, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends it to all 1-year-old children and populations at higher risk, such as people traveling to countries with higher hep A rates (including Central America and South America), men who have sex with men and people with chronic liver disease. For more details, see "How Can Hepatitis A Be Prevented?"

Not everyone with hep A will show symptoms. But according to the Hep Basics, symptoms of hepatitis A (and acute hepatitis in general) include:

- Yellowing of the skin, whites of the eyes and under the fingernails (jaundice)
- Feeling tired and rundown (fatigue)
- Pain in the upper-right abdomen
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Fever
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Dark urine and/or pale stool
- Joint pain

Vaccines are also available for hepatitis B. Currently, there isn't one for hep C, the other common type of hepatitis in the United States. To learn more about hepatitis and other liver diseases, see Hep's Introduction to Hepatitis.

In related news, you can track hepatitis A outbreaks across the country with an interactive map and a roundup of related articles organized by state. To access the map and links, see "Hepatitis A in America."

And for a roundup of hep A articles, click #Hepatitis A, where you'll find headlines such as "Why Can't Pharmacists in New York State Give Hepatitis Vaccinations? [VIDEO]" and "Five Goals of the New National Plan to End Viral Hepatitis."

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