

# Berger Food Safety Consulting

## Hepatitis A

### Did You Know?

- ☐ That an outbreak of hepatitis A linked to your establishment may cost you over \$100,000.
- ☐ A hepatitis A outbreak directly linked to one employee at a fast food restaurant lasted for more than 2 years.
- ☐ If a food handler is diagnosed with hepatitis A, the restaurant may be required to notify the public and patrons may need to get a shot to protect their health.
- ☐ Massachusetts has seen a significant rise in the numbers of cases of hepatitis A in the past year affecting more than 9 food establishments.

### What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver and causes fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin, eyes and dark urine.) Adults are usually more ill than children. Symptoms can last from two weeks to six months.



### How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A is spread through the “fecal-oral” route of transmission. The virus is spread from person to person when an infected person uses the bathroom, does not wash his or her hands, and proceeds to prepare or handle food for other people. The virus may also be spread through sharing of food or cigarettes or other close contact.

### Who gets hepatitis A?

Anyone can get hepatitis A. People who live with or have sexual contact with people with the disease are at highest risk of contracting it. It also spreads easily in daycare settings where many children are in diapers and cannot wash their own hands. Anyone who eats food prepared by an infected person can also get hepatitis A.



### Why is this a concern in the restaurant industry?

Generally, the restaurant industry does not play a major role in outbreaks of hepatitis A. However, one food handler infected with hepatitis A may potentially infect many other people including other food handlers and patrons. If your restaurant is responsible for even one case of hepatitis A, the negative publicity, legal costs, and loss of revenue from having to close may be devastating.



## What can we do to prevent hepatitis A at our restaurant?

One of the best ways of preventing hepatitis A is strict adherence to hand washing after toileting and before food handling. A person is able to spread the virus to other people for up to two weeks before symptoms appear; therefore, excluding a food handler with symptoms of hepatitis A is too late. There is also a vaccine that protects against hepatitis A.

## Should the entire staff be vaccinated?

There is no right answer. One needs to assess the pro's and con's of vaccinating food handling employees against hepatitis A.

### PRO's:

- ☐ The cost associated with a hepatitis A outbreak far exceeds the costs of vaccinating staff.
- ☐ Vaccinating staff greatly reduces the risk of an outbreak of hepatitis A associated with a restaurant.
- ☐ Vaccinating your staff demonstrates your commitment to food safety to the community and your patrons.
- ☐ You will be providing your staff with long-term protection from hepatitis A.

### CON's:

- ☐ Depending on the number of employees vaccinated, the cost associated with vaccine may be prohibitive.
- ☐ Vaccinating against hepatitis A may lead to a false sense of security against other foodborne diseases.

If you are interested in implementing a vaccination policy in your establishment, Berger Food Safety Consulting is available for consultation. We can also set up and organize a complete hepatitis A vaccination clinic for your staff. You decide on place and time and we'll be there. If interested in more information on hepatitis A, the hepatitis A vaccine, or any other foodborne illnesses, contact:



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