

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Ron DeSantis
Governor

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

May 1, 2019

Pinellas County Commissioners
315 Court Street, 5th Floor
Clearwater, FL 33756

Dear Commissioners,

I am aware that hepatitis A is in the headlines in Pinellas and wanted to provide some background information.

Similar to national trends, Pinellas has seen an increase in hepatitis A cases. We have reported 319 cases since 2018. What is concerning is that prior to 2018 we averaged two to four cases annually. Pinellas does have the highest case count in the state. The biggest risk factors include drug usage and homelessness. In many ways, the increase in hepatitis A cases is mirroring the rise in illicit substances as we are seeing more overdoses within our community. The good news is that we had less cases in April when compared to March and hopeful the decrease in numbers continue.

Regarding some of our interventions, DOH-Pinellas has offered hepatitis A vaccine at no-cost since September of 2018 at our five clinical sites. We have provided close to 7,300 vaccines since last year. We have conducted over 100 community outreaches and engaged multiple community partners including the medical community, jails, substance abuse providers, and homeless shelters. We have had multiple media awareness campaigns on social media, interviews, columns, PSA, and bus wraps. We will continue to promote vaccination and good hand-hygiene.

If we find and confirm an infected food handler, we contact restaurant management and recommend co-workers receive vaccination per CDC guidelines. We then assess several factors including whether the individual was symptomatic with diarrhea, infectious during their work schedule, and the type of job when determining a need for patron notification. Additionally, our environmental health unit conducts a joint investigation with the Department of Business and Professional Regulation to assess the hand-hygiene practices of the establishment. If some of these criteria are met and deemed a concern for public health, we make a public notification. Of note, we have made one public notification in Pinellas at Toasted Monkey. The current outbreak has not been food borne. In fact, we have no evidence of transmission via an infected food handler with any of the cases.

DOH-Pinellas will continue our efforts and will keep our community informed. I also plan to include a discussion on hepatitis A in my presentation for next week with the BCC.

Should you need additional information, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ulyee Choe".

Ulyee Choe, DO
County Health Department Director