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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF AWARENESS AND PREVENTION OF HEPATITIS A



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Monroe County, Fla.— Hepatitis A is on the rise in Florida. In Monroe County, the Florida Department of Health in Monroe County (FDOH-Monroe) encourages residents and visitors to be informed about the disease. Monroe County may be at risk for cases due to the influx of tourists as well as a large transient population in the county, but steps can be taken to prevent the spread of infection.

“Hepatitis A is rarely fatal and getting vaccinated is the single most important action that people who are at risk can take to avoid contracting the disease,” states Ysla Veliz, RN and lead epidemiologist for the Florida Department of Health in Monroe County. “It is important to understand that hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable liver disease. If you believe you may have hepatitis A, please consult with your doctor, especially if you have underlying health problems such as chronic liver or kidney disease or a weak immune system.”

Hepatitis A vaccines are provided at FDOH-Monroe at no cost to uninsured and underinsured. The two-part vaccine is given six months apart and can be obtained by appointment only at all three locations at FDOH-Monroe in Key West, Marathon, and Tavernier. To make an appointment, call (305) 293-7500.

About hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable liver disease. While normally not fatal, persons with chronic liver or kidney disease or compromised immune systems are more likely to experience a severe illness, leading to liver failure and possible death.

Hepatitis A is transmitted from person-to-person through contact with an infected person's feces. This can result from poor hand washing after going to the bathroom. Hepatitis A can also be spread through food or water contaminated with fecal matter or during close contact with others, such as sexual contact. While most patients with hepatitis A will fully recover, some may require hospitalization. Deaths rarely occur.

The symptoms of hepatitis A can include: fever, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), tiredness, loss of appetite, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, diarrhea, and gray clay-colored stool. If you have symptoms of hepatitis A, you should visit your health care provider for evaluation. People that are exposed to hepatitis A may be given vaccine or immune globulin within 14 days of exposure to prevent infection.

DOH recommends that health care providers offer hepatitis A vaccine to all persons at risk of hepatitis A infection who have not been vaccinated or do not know their vaccination status.

Health care providers are also asked to immediately report all cases of hepatitis A to their local county health department to ensure a prompt public health response to prevent disease among close contacts. For more information on the Florida hepatitis A outbreak visit www.floridahealth.gov/hepa.

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