



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
APRIL 23, 2008

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COUNTY INVESTIGATING SOURCE OF HEPATITIS A INFECTION ***HHS, Environmental Health Officials Working to Determine Source of Disease***

The San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) and County Department of Environmental Health (DEH) are investigating six cases of Hepatitis A that are possibly linked to a La Mesa *Chipotle* restaurant. The County recommends that individuals who dined at the restaurant between March 1 and April 22, 2008 - and are symptomatic for Hepatitis A - see their physician to be screened for the illness.

"Our Community Epidemiology Branch and DEH are working closely with the restaurant to determine the source of the Hepatitis A infection," said Wilma Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., County of San Diego Public Health Officer. "Hepatitis A is a vaccine-preventable illness, and we recommend that the public talk to their physicians about getting vaccinated against Hepatitis A.

Epidemiology and DEH staff are conducting interviews with restaurant employees and patients and taking blood samples to determine the source of infection.

"We don't yet know if the source was an ill person or contaminated food," said Gary Erbeck, director, DEH. "*Chipotle* officials have been cooperative as the investigation continues."

"The health and safety of our customers and employees is our highest priority," said Monty Moran, president and chief operating officer of *Chipotle*. "We have done and will continue to do everything we can to assist the health department in identifying the cause of this illness."

Hepatitis A is commonly transmitted when an object contaminated with the stool of someone with Hepatitis A comes in contact with another person's mouth. Exposure also can take place when an individual consumes food or water contaminated with the Hepatitis A virus. Good hygiene practices, including washing hands or the use of hand sanitizer after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing and eating food, are important to prevent the spread of Hepatitis A.

Symptoms include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice. Hepatitis A does not become chronic; symptoms usually last less than 2 months.

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Page 2

In 2007, there were 82 cases of Hepatitis A in San Diego County. Individuals with no medical provider, or anyone who would like more information, may call the County Epidemiology Branch at (619) 515-6620. Information about Hepatitis A vaccine may be obtained from the HHS Immunizations Branch at (619) 692-8661. More information is also available at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.cdc.gov.

Editor's Note: The County Public Health Officer and Director of Environmental Health will be available to speak with reporters at 2:00 p.m., 1700 Pacific Highway, San Diego.

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